

# **Making meaning:**

## **A Team of Early Childhood Education Teachers Working Towards Registration from a Group Perspective**

DEBORAH RYDER

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## **Abstract**

In 2004, with only one fully registered teacher in the early childhood centre where this investigation is set, a question arose as to how five non-registered teachers could be guided through individual programmes of registration advice and guidance. This investigation explores a group approach to early childhood teacher registration, where five registering teachers engaged in written reflections and discussion with their registration tutor, who was also the researcher. The teachers used practitioner inquiry as they explored their own practice and the practice of the team. The researcher used practitioner research to build on the teacher's inquiries. Individual written reflections and group discussions began to highlight differences in the ways teacher's interpreted practice.

As part of its communication processes the group regularly compared and categorised individual reflections. These general themes were made public and shared with the group, using a process that this research refers to as the 'common anonymous voice'.

The key findings from this investigation concern the role practitioner action research played in the communication of the group. Discussion and written reflections were shown to provide the group with alternative forms of communication. As tensions and challenges regarding group practice emerged in the discussions, teachers began to rely more on the reflective writing process to articulate their own professional philosophies. Shifts in group dynamics were highlighted as the group moved from the need to

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agree, through to an acceptance of diversity. Individual teaching beliefs and practices were seen as contributing to the collective process of teaching and learning. The reflexive action research framework developed in this study aligns itself with sociocultural notions of learning and development. Links are made with the professional development of the individual teacher and the collective process of the registration group.

# Chapter One: Setting the scene

## 1:1 Introduction

In 2002, the New Zealand government announced its ten year plan for early childhood education policy: *Pathways to the future/Nga Haurahi Arataki* (Ministry of Education, 2002). The government announced the need for a 3-step initiative targeting teacher qualifications and registration in licensed early childhood and care centres. By January 2005, all ‘persons responsible’ (a ‘person responsible’ is the Head Teacher or Supervisor of the ECE centre) needed to be fully registered and hold a current practising certificate. By 2007, fifty percent of all ‘regulated’ teachers (‘regulated’ means staff required for the ratio specified on the licence) that were employed in any early childhood education service must be registered and hold a current practising certificate. By 2012, almost all of regulated teachers employed in a teacher-led licensed early childhood education setting must be registered and hold a current practicing certificate.

The requirement of the newly registering teacher is that they must apply to the New Zealand Teachers Council to become provisionally registered. The teacher then agrees to undertake a two year full-time (or its equivalent in part-time hours) guidance program. The registering teacher’s practice is observed by a registered teacher. Together, they identify areas of practice for reflection and change. At the end of the process of observation and mentoring, the registered teacher attests that the registering teacher is

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competent in the following teaching standards: professional knowledge, professional relationships, professional leadership, and professional practice.

At the time that this report was written, The New Zealand Teachers Council was making amendments to the 'graduating teaching standards' that teachers had to meet before they completed their teacher training. The draft graduating teaching standards sit within three groupings: professional knowledge, professional practice, and professional values and relationships. A final 'graduating teaching standards' document will be made available in 2007. The New Zealand Teachers Council is also in the process of reviewing the Satisfactory Teacher Dimensions. This is to ensure there is continuity between the knowledge and skills obtained during teacher training, through to employment as a registering teacher.

## **1:2 Regulatory demands and shifts in practice**

Prior to 2005, the demand was not as high for new graduates to become registered as there were no monetary incentives for either the individual teacher or the centre. At the time, the gradual flow of teachers wanting to register matched the amount of teachers able to act as registration mentors (or registration tutors as will be used in this report). However, it soon became evident that as the regulatory requirements came in there were not going to be enough fully registered teachers in each early childhood centre to act as individual mentors or registration tutors.

To ease the transition to full registration the government allocated funds for individual registering teachers to support their professional development process in becoming fully registered teachers. As an incentive to the centres the government increased the hourly funding rate depending on the number of regulated registered teachers. For funding purposes, a 'registered teacher' is any provisionally registered teacher who is working towards full registration, as well as those teachers who have previously obtained full registration status.

Aside from the changes that are occurring with the employment of more registered teachers, the last ten to fifteen years have also seen other major shifts in early childhood education philosophy and pedagogy in New Zealand. A shift has occurred in early childhood education towards viewing learning and development from a sociocultural perspective. Meaning making is seen as occurring in a community, rather than as an isolated event by one child. The philosophy and pedagogy of the early childhood setting that this investigation is set in supports a sociocultural approach to teaching and learning (Wright, Ryder & Mayo, 2006).

### **1:3 Practitioner inquiry and practitioner research**

The philosophy and pedagogy of sociocultural theory is consistent with the concept of practitioner inquiry. In practitioner inquiry teachers participate in a process of knowledge construction which contributes to meaningful changes in practice (Keesing-Styles & Hedges, 2007, p. 191).

Teachers make informed decisions which are based on contextual

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evidence. Individual and collaborative team practice is described by MacPherson, Brooker, Aspland, & Cuskelly, (2004) as the first two of four stages of inquiry. These first two stages that teachers take part in are explored through a practitioner inquiry approach

Practitioner research takes the inquiry process further by encompassing, 3) systematic inquiry, a literature base, suitable methodology, ethical considerations, and 4) opening up the research process to scrutiny by presenting or publishing. Practitioner research is seen as being visible at all four levels, only the first two of these occur in practitioner inquiry (MacPherson et al, 2004).

#### **1:4 Multiple roles held by the researcher**

In this investigation multiple roles were held by the researcher. This is supported by sociocultural notions of learning and development, where expertise occurs within the learning community and does not need to be called on from the outside. The researcher held the role of infant and toddler practitioner in this early childhood education setting, and this allowed her to contribute knowledge about current practices in the early childhood setting.

The researcher held the position of head teacher of the centre. This brought an in-depth understanding of the running of the centre to the registration forum. Sociocultural theory supports the concept of individuals members of the community holding expertise that they can contribute to the process of learning and development. The head teacher

had twenty years experience working in the early childhood education sector.

The researcher also held the role of registration tutor. As an active member of the centre the registration tutor could always have an informed knowledge of the teaching and learning that occurred, and of individual teacher's achievements and progress. It will be the role of the registration tutor to guide the individual teacher's registration programme within the group approach.

As researcher there was active involvement in the systematic inquiry of the group, creating a literature based on this inquiry, choosing a suitable methodology, and considering the ethical requirements of everyone involved in the research process.

Sociocultural underpinnings support the concept of differing areas of expertise that an individual member of the group may hold. This in no way undermines the expertise and experience that other individual members of the learning community contribute to the learning process. In this way all members of the registration group were seen as equal participants.

As there was only one fully registered teacher to act as registration tutor a dilemma arose as to how all five teachers would be able to carry out an individual registration programme. A discussion was held between the head teacher and teachers regarding the idea of a group approach to registration. This would see all the teachers work on their registration process together. Teachers were individually asked by the head teacher

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how they felt about taking part in a registration approach that would see each teacher reflect and discuss their practice from a combined perspective. All teachers agreed with the group approach being a feasible option, and were keen on exploring their practice together. Teachers felt that a group approach to teacher registration would fit in with the way they work together as a combined teaching team. The head teacher suggested that a monthly one hour meeting would become the setting for the teachers' registration program.

### **1:5 Describing the investigation**

A group approach to registration had not been previously documented or researched. Therefore this opened up an opportunity to research the registration programme in action. Teachers were asked if they fundamentally agreed with the concept of the registration tutor acting as researcher as well. The teachers agreed as long as the research methods did not over rule and direct the teachers registration programme. The teachers were keen on the idea that through this process of being researched they might assist the fellow early childhood education colleagues.

### **1:6 Research question**

Some early working questions that arose to guide the investigation were -  
What role might discussion play in the meaning making of this combined registration program? How will teachers incorporate written reflection? Will individual teachers feel comfortable to share their reflections in a

group approach? How might written reflection impact on the meaning making of the individual as well as the group? How might an action research methodology strengthen discussion and written reflection in a group registration guidance program?

A broad research question was formulated that would allow room for an emergent exploration into how processes of discussion, written reflection and facilitation might combine and benefit a group of teachers working towards teacher registration.

### **Research question**

**How do a team of early childhood education teachers make meaning while working towards registration from a group perspective?**

## Chapter Two – Literature review

“With so many people engaged in so common a mission in so compact a space and time, it is perhaps the greatest irony – and the greatest tragedy of teaching – that so much is carried on in self-imposed and professionally sanctioned isolation”.

(Berman and Miller, 1990. cited in Cole & Knowles, 2000, p. 135).

### 2:1 Introduction

The overall theme of this literature review focuses on ways in which early childhood education teachers make meaning of their own and their colleagues every day practice. Sociocultural theory (and more particularly the concept of learning within a community) is discussed as playing an influential role to the way teachers might view their practice of working together. The literature explores reflective practice as a meaning making process for the teacher as an individual. Terms such as critically reflective practice, reflective inquiry, collaborative inquiry, reflexive inquiry, and collaborative reflexive inquiry are explored as possible ways for groups to make meaning of their practice. Reflective writing and journaling are discussed as tools which may allow individual teacher to articulate current inquiries into their practice.

Early childhood training, professional development, mentoring and team development are briefly examined to give a broad understanding of the context in which this investigation is set.

## **2:2 Sociocultural theory**

Sociocultural explanations for human development have become increasingly influential in early childhood literature (Nuttall & Edwards, 2007). Sociocultural learning views development as a process that occurs for the individual in the context of their community. Early childhood education teachers work in teams, and as such, individual teachers are required to participate in the context of their early childhood setting (learning community).

Nuttall et al (2007) describes Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, where children and teachers (or a more able peer) work within a 'zone of proximal development' (ZPD). In the ZPD the child and adult are relating on two simultaneous planes of development, that is, intrapersonal and interpersonal. Rogoff (1998, 2003) extended on Vygotsky's idea of learning and development by adding a third aspect that is influential to learning, that is, the community (or institutional) plane of development.

Rogoff (2003) proposes that there are three foci of analysis of socio-cultural activity, intrapersonal, interpersonal, and cultural-institutional. Together, the three lenses (or foci of analysis) constitute the experience. No aspect can be studied in isolation from the other.

Analysis of interpersonal relationships would not be able to occur without information about the context in which they are working within. At the same time there will be some attention to personal processes that are occurring within the experience (intrapersonal). The observer is also

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important because the focus of analysis stems from what we as observers choose to examine. Rogoff (2003, pp. 53 – 61) states that “the distinction between what we choose to foreground or background lies in our analysis, and is not assumed to be a separate entity in reality... people contribute to the creation of cultural processes and cultural processes contribute to the creation of people”.

Ryder, Wright, Adams and Jones (2004) discuss how Rogoff’s (2003) three lenses were evident in their community of learners.

The cultural/historical lens brings into focus some of the practices, or cultural tools as members of the community engaged in joint participation. They describe how they need to be cautious when viewing through this lens, as Rogoff (2003, p. 61) explains “It does not make sense to try to study cultural processes without considering the contributions of the people involved.” Ryder et al (2004) discusses the use of the cultural/historical lens as bringing into focus some of the practices, or cultural tools, that have developed over time to engage members of the community in joint participation.

The interpersonal lens is described in Ryder et al (2004) as allowing for a focus on what the members of their learning community are doing together and how their relationships interact and support centre activities and experiences. Looking through the interpersonal lens allows the teachers to explore the relationships that occur within the project based learning that was occurring in their centre.

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Individual interests emerging for different children are identified by Ryder et al (2004) as examples of the intrapersonal lens in action. The teachers recognise individual children's levels of participation and self-confidence using the intra-personal lens.

Rogoff's (1998, 2003) socio-cultural perspective clearly positions all other members of the community as equal contributors to the teaching and learning process. Wright, Ryder & Mayo (2006) support this concept and state that expertise is not viewed as just being held by the early childhood teacher (in this case), but the child and parent also play an equal role. All members of the community can contribute expertise at differing levels depending on their areas of interest.

The concept of viewing teaching and learning as a joint responsibility of all members of the community can be referred to as a 'community of learners' perspective (Rogoff, 1994). Learning and development is viewed as a *transformation-of-participation* of all members of the Community of Learners. In the community of learners approach a new form of discourse and meaning making occurs, one that is based on mutual respect and participation. Rogoff (1994) discusses how participation, learning and development occur as people participate in sociocultural/historical activities within their community together. A community of learners approach occurs where participants are actively involved in meaningful social activity. The 'activity' that the group is involved in reflects the learning that is valued by the community itself. Through a process of

transformation of participation (Rogoff, 2003), each member of the group comes together in a joint meaning making process.

The idea of communities of learners is complementary to Wenger (1998) who talks about learners being drawn together by a common practice. Wenger (1998) describes his perspective as communities of practice. In this approach the emphasis is on the particular ways that members of that community carry out their practice and the influence this has on participation in the group. Wenger (1998) discusses the community of practice concept as a way of defining the identity of the practice.

Early childhood education teachers could be viewed as working within one entire community of practice. While also particular early childhood settings could be viewed as being a community of practice, depending on the commonly held philosophical beliefs and practices of the particular setting.

The term reification is used by Wenger (1998) to describe the transference of knowledge of the identity of a particular community of practice. The knowledge that is held by members of the learning community is re-presented (or reified) in a way that has meaning for others. Reification can be seen as a form of meaning making. A concept is reified, when, for example, it initially is articulated in a written format (e.g.: a paper written for a presentation) and then re-represented in another format (e.g. verbally presented, with a visual presentation). This process of re-representation

may allow a strengthened or perhaps completely different meaning to occur to the original concept.

The concept of meaning making being a process that is open to interpretation is an integral aspect of the early childhood education pedagogy of Reggio Emilia, northern Italy. The Reggio Emilia pedagogy prides itself on 'valuing the unknown', rather than placing a value on certainty, 'truth', and 'correct' answers'. This belief has stemmed from their image of the child and childhood. Children are viewed, not as receivers of information but are seen as "competent, resourceful social beings capable of theorising and researching" the unknown ideas (Giamminuti (2007, p. 2).

The pedagogy of Reggio Emilia also views teachers as active theorists and researchers. As early childhood education teachers begin to embrace the pedagogical concept of teachers as researchers it influences the way they view the image of themselves as teachers. A new understanding is emerging where meaning making is occurring between theory and practice, and theorists and practitioners.

### **2:3 Reflective practice**

Reflective practice is beginning to play an integral role in the way in which early childhood teachers are linking theory and practice, however it is a process that is fraught with difficulties. Hatton (2006) describes some of the problems associated with reflection. One problem identified is the

resistance that many teachers show, because they view the reflective process as not being related to their everyday teaching. Hatton (2006) says that it takes time and opportunity to develop the required meta-cognitive skills. Teachers want to teach, rather than focus on reflection. Hatton (2006) asserts that teachers need to have an existing knowledge base, of understanding what reflection means. This needs to occur before teachers engage in reflection. Another problem is that teachers may feel vulnerable, as they are asked to expose their weaknesses. This may cause tensions between fostering reflection and the desire to promote quality practice.

Inquiry is a process that does not come easily to teachers, and is one that also involves a higher level of thinking and discussion than normally occurs in everyday teaching. Cole and Knowles (2000) describe how generally, in teaching teams, conversations with peers remain mainly superficial. Teachers rarely have the time or opportunity to discuss the perplexing matters of everyday teaching, and the intellectual rigours of being better teachers, never occur. Cole et al (2000) describe how isolation is often a prominent theme in teachers' discourse about teaching. Often in schools, daily routines keep teachers from working together; sharing ideas and helping one another become better teachers. Inquiry does not sit easily with many teachers, as the regular process of teaching often absorbs their time and attention.

Van Manen (1977) devised a hierarchy of reflection that is helpful in understanding the difference between reflection and critical reflection. The

first level - technical reflection is concerned with identifying an effective means to achieve certain ends. The second level – practical reflection allows for the exploration of, not only the means, but the goals and assumptions upon which they are based. This type of reflection recognises that meaning is constructed, rather than being an absolute truth, and is negotiated in the language used. The third level – critical reflection includes the previous two levels, and also considers moral and ethical criteria in the action reflected on. Critical reflection acknowledges that all personal action is set in the context of the wider socio-historical and cultural context.

Hatton (2006) discusses the importance of not seeing Van Manen's (1977) levels of reflection as a hierarchy of reflection. For example, technical reflection is viewed as an essential aspect of initial development in regards to critical reflection.

Kolb's (1984) reflective cycle explores concrete experience, which is doing or having an experience. Reflective observation is the reviewing and reflecting on the experience. Abstract conceptualism is the conclusion drawn from the experience. Active experimentation is the planning and putting into action of what has been learnt.

Smyth (1992) describes reflection as meaning all things to all people and that the term reflective practice can run the risk of losing meaning altogether. Smyth (1989) discusses critical reflection as a process by which teachers confront their work in ways that allow them to make new

understandings. Teachers are encouraged to consider their work at an institutional and wider political level. Smyth (1989) suggests a process that includes describing the situation, informing the assumptions the teacher is operating from, and confronting their pedagogical practices by asking what is being said about assumptions, and finally, reconstructing how things might be done differently next time.

Brookfield (1995) discussed critical reflection as a process of looking at what we do from as many unfamiliar angles as possible. He discussed viewing practice through four distinct lenses. The autobiographical lens assists teachers to put themselves in the role of the 'other', seeing their practice as if it were from the other side of the mirror. Personal self-reflection allows teachers to become aware of assumptions and beliefs that frame their practice. Once teachers have identified these assumptions the second lens allows teachers, to view their practice through their students' eyes. This process assists teachers to discover whether students take from the teacher's practice the meaning that was intended. Brookfield's third lens, viewing our practice through our colleagues eyes, invites colleagues to watch what teachers do, allowing them to show teachers aspects of their practice that are normally hidden. Finally, Brookfield's fourth lens suggests exploring literature as a way of naming teachers practice in different ways. This allows teachers to view their practice in a new light, and enables them to make multiple interpretations of familiar practices.

By naming existing practice, the theoretical lens assists teachers to discover alternative approaches to practice.

Carr and Kemmis (1986), Giroux (1994) and Darder (2002), believe that critical reflection means “a collective examination of the social and political factors that produce knowledge and practices, together with the use of this knowledge to strategically transform education in socially progressive directions” (cited in Mac Naughton, 2003, p.3).

Post modern perspectives have introduced an added understanding of what critical reflection might look like Critical reflection is viewed as a process of “exploring where our ‘big ideas’ or ‘truths’ about how the world works have come from, who has generated them and whose interests they serve” (MacNaughton, 2003, p. 3).

Reflective inquiry is a term that is often connected with reflective practice. Cole & Knowles (2000) describe reflective inquiry as an on-going process of examining and refining practice based on personal, pedagogical, curricular, intellectual and societal perspectives. Reflective inquiry is not necessarily taken from a critical perspective. Cochrane-Smith and Lytle (1993) acknowledge teachers as ‘knowledge builders’, and ask the thought provoking question, How much is known when knowledge is defined apart from the knower?

Cole & Knowles (2000) describe another form of inquiry that relies on critical reflection. Reflexive inquiry is a process of exploration into personal assumptions and beliefs, which is rooted in a critical perspective.

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Cole & Knowles (2000) view reflexive inquiry as an interrogation of the status quo norms and practices, especially where issues of power and control are occurring. Reflexive inquiry is set in the context of personal histories, and makes connections between personal lives and professional careers. Cole & Knowles (2000) likens the process of reflexive inquiry to the way that light rays can change direction, even bending back on themselves. This causes the light rays to move in directions opposite to the original path. In a similar manner, reflexive inquiry can sometimes lead to a complete turnabout in thinking.

Reflexive inquiry as a framework is built on notions of personal empowerment and self-directed learning. Cole & Knowles (2000) describe the concept of learning being life long and being an 'autobiographical project'. This consists of an ongoing inquiry into self, contexts and relationships. Knowing ourselves as people is very much a part of knowing ourselves as professionals. Reflexive inquiry allows teachers to gain insights into themselves as developing professionals, and creates a way of recording one's own professional development, beginning with the past and continuing into the present. Cole & Knowles (2000) claims that, 'we teach who we are'.

Collaborative reflexive inquiry views inquiry from a group perspective. Cole and Knowles (2000, p. 141) refer to the concept of "relational learning through collaborative reflexive inquiry with peers". In a collaborative reflexive inquiry approach connections could be made

between people who already work together or who have great potential to collegially work in relation with each other. Cole and Knowles (2000) discuss the importance in developing a focal point for the inquiry. Initially individual and collective teachers might centre their inquiry on their personal histories.

## **2:4 Team professional development**

Collaborative reflexive inquiry depends on a level of team cohesion. Rodd (1998) says the development of a team is not an easy task and should be viewed as an ongoing process. Rodd (1998) says that the responsibility of team development is held by the leader. She states that teams go through stages of development not dissimilar to that of birth to maturity. Rodd (1998) discusses the following stages:

### *Stage one: Getting together as a team*

This is the stage where a group of people know that they are going to work together. It is the role of the leader to address the needs of the group, to ensure that the team feels comfortable in this initial stage. Relationship and group morale aspects can be difficult to manage at this point. Members of the team are concerned with such issues as belonging, inclusion, rejection, and may be unwilling to disclose any personal concerns and weaknesses. When a degree of trust and security emerges in the group, individual members begin to feel more comfortable with each other.

### *Stage two: Confronting conflict in the team*

It initially comes as a surprise to all involved, that the team that initially got on so well, disintegrates, and as Rodd (1998, p. 106) states, the team becomes “marked by open and covert displays of antagonism to one another, dispute, dissention and discord”. She states that “the honeymoon period is over”. It may appear to the leader, that the team is stuck in a cycle of conflict which produces a high level of stress for all involved. The leader needs to facilitate a sense of closure to this aspect of the group and re-orientate the group back to their original ideas and visions. If the leader can facilitate this shift in the behaviour of the group, the team will begin to focus again on team goals.

### *Stage three: Consensus and cooperation in the team*

Rodd (1998) says that while the group may appear to be operating in a more dynamic manner, members are not yet performing in a unified way. The team is now at a point however where they are prepared to take some risks with new practices and debate values and assumptions. A breach of trust at this stage will reverse the progress of the team. Decision making and problem solving skills become the focus of the leader at this point, and the group comes to favour a democratic style of leadership. The focus is on group relationships in the team. Although conflict and disagreement may occur at this third stage, they are seen as less threatening. It is important for the group to protect group cohesion. Rodd (1998) says that the main aim of the leader is to promote consensus and cooperation. Open

communication and feedback encourages the team to identify and address potential problems.

*Stage four: Effective team performance*

Rodd (1998) says that the rate to which a team reaches this fourth stage depends on the effectiveness of the leader to facilitate the transition through the stages. All members of the team are seen as making a unique but equal contribution. The responsibility of leadership becomes shared, and mutual respect and support become integral aspects of the relationships in the team. When a team reaches this level of 'maturity' in their development they can operate productively for a long period of time. The following questions are consistently addressed in team discussions: How are we going? Where do we want to go next? What are our needs now?

*Stage five: Separation and closure*

Rodd (1998) explains that often this final stage is ignored by team leaders. Change occurs consistently within teams, members leave and new members join. Time needs to be allowed to 'mourn' the departure of members, and celebrate the track record of the team. It is important that team leaders allow opportunities for the group to experience some form of closure. In this way, unfinished business can be discussed, which might have otherwise prevented the team to move forward. When a team ceases to be operational, members need to come to terms with disengagement

from the reason for creating the team, and separation from, or closure of, relationships.

The stress involved with the closure of a team may create stress in the everyday working lives of the teachers. Rodd (1998) says that at this stage it is important that the leader concentrates on the social and emotional needs of the teachers who are part of that team. If, when the team ends, a lack of achievement is evident, it is more difficult to engage in a process of closure. However, it is even more important to ensure that an effective process of closure does occur, than if the team felt they achieved a lot. Individual and team contribution should be reviewed and evaluated in order to identify the problems in the team. This allows a basis of planning for when the team meets together again.

The evaluation and review of individual and team contribution should be seen as an ongoing process. Rodd (1998) says that this is promoted through regular mentoring and professional development, and is especially important as beginning teacher's transition from their teacher education program into their first teaching environment.

## **2:5     Mentoring and professional development**

Cameron (2002) describes how a deep level of knowledge about teaching takes several years to develop, and is dependent on continuing mentoring and professional development. Mentoring and professional development is the focus of research performed by Aitken (2005), in which she conducted

research into a group of eight newly qualified teachers in the eighteen months following the completion of their initial teacher education. The participants in this study worked in kindergartens, and private and community childcare and education centres. Aitken (2005) looked at the amount of support and mentoring that newly qualified teachers received in their first eighteen months of teaching. All the newly qualified teachers in her study, who worked in childcare and education centres, were immediately placed in roles of responsibility in their early childhood centre, and had little, if any support themselves. Teachers in childcare and education centres were having high expectations put on them, with some placed in positions of high responsibility in their first year or two of employment. This differed dramatically from the teachers who worked in kindergartens. These teachers were not put into an early position of supporting others. This was due to the fact that there were no unqualified teachers in the centre for them to support, and that they were the least experienced and trained. Some of the childcare and education teachers in the study expressed resentment at expectations of support and mentoring responsibilities placed on them at the beginning teacher stage.

Aitken (2005) points out that many of the teachers from the childcare and education centres are not beginning teachers, as they have been working as untrained teachers prior to their training. She prefers to use the term 'newly qualified' teacher to replace the term 'beginning' teacher. This term represents the fact that many teachers in early childhood education,

who have just obtained their qualification, may have many years prior teaching experience. Therefore these teachers are neither ‘beginning’ nor ‘new’ as is normally understood with the term beginning teacher.

As the newly qualified teacher undertakes employment they will be required to take part in a teacher registration process. The centre and newly qualified teacher will need to work together to find a registered teacher who will act as a mentor. Once a registered teacher has been identified an advice and guidance program begins.

## **2:6 Pedagogical documentation**

All teacher registration programmes are dependent on an element of documentation of practice. This documentation acts as a common point for discussion between the newly qualified teacher and the registration tutor. Malaguzzi (cited in Filippini, 2006, p. 1) likens the role of teachers and their use of documentation to: “archaeologists who return in the evening with their finds, reading over their sketches, notes and writings”. As described earlier in this review, the pedagogical documentation of Reggio Emilia has become influential to teaching and learning internationally. Pedagogical documentation is described as ‘visible learning’, and is a process of observing, interpreting, and recording the process of children’s learning (Rinaldi, 2001; Giamminuti, 2007). For registration purposes teachers must show evidence of observations, interpretations and recording of their own learning.

A move in early childhood education in New Zealand towards writing learning stories (Carr, 2001) sees a narrative sociocultural approach to documentation. As teachers began to position themselves within the learning stories, rather than as outside observers they began to view themselves as learners as well. A teaching story approach allows teachers to write their own stories which encourages an understanding of their individual skills, knowledge, values and attitudes in relation to the teaching and learning that is occurring in the early childhood setting.

As teachers become more comfortable with writing about and evaluating their practice the concept of keeping a reflective journal for teacher registration purposes is perhaps becoming less daunting. Reflective journals are viewed as one way in which registering teachers can record and document their ongoing mentoring and professional development process. Holly (1987), cited in O'Connor & Diggins, (2002)) refers to the keeping of a journal as a humbling process, where one relies on ones senses and impressions. Personal experiences are recorded as vividly and creatively as possible, with the person writing in the journal becoming both learner and teacher.

O'Connor & Diggins (2002) view journals as a personal and professional tool. They describe the writing process as being substantial enough to enable reflection, yet allow the voice of the writer to be clearly apparent. They believe it is important to commit to ongoing reflection, so that the benefit can be gained over time.



O'Connor & Diggins (2002) says how each entry should begin with the date and a description of the setting or context. Recording when and where the reflection happened. This allows similarities or differences to be identified with other journal entries. It is good practice for each journal entry to have a separate title that is specific to that entry. This makes it easy to refer back to the content of the entry at another time. The process of deciding on the title is a form of reflection in itself, and can help identify why the reflection was worth recording. There should be space left on the page for future comments.

O'Connor & Diggins (2002) suggest a simple reflective format known as 'stop, think, change'. The 'stop' phase represents a description of something that has occurred at a particular time. The 'think' phase allows an opportunity to reflect on the role the teacher is taking and the learning that is occurring within the role. The 'change' phase allows a chance for the teacher to reflect on what practice might occur differently if this situation would reoccur. Holly (1987) suggests that effective journaling occurs in a cycle.

The first part of the cycle is to reflect on an event or situation. The second part of the cycle is a later reflection on the journal entry itself from which deeper reflection is gained. When looking back on a reflection it gives a better understanding of the role the teacher played in the event. This may lead the teacher to be more forgiving and more understanding of personal professional development. Holly (1987) describes this as a process of

developing dialogue with oneself over time. On reflection of the event, events may be interpreted differently, and patterns may be revealed in events that previously seemed isolated incidents.

## **Chapter three: Methodology and method**

### **3.1 Methodology**

This chapter describes practitioner action research as the methodology that influences this investigation. Research methods used are described as is the data collection process. Sociocultural notions of learning and development are evident as underpinnings to the methodology and method of this investigation.

### **3:2 Action research**

Action research is a common methodology used in practitioner research because it is based on the premise of action and change. Goodfellow and Hedges (2007), describe action research as a spiral or cyclical approach, directed towards the improvement of practice. Normally, a practical and problem-solving orientation is involved in action research. Participants are encouraged to engage in all aspects of the research cycle. Action research can be carried out either individually or collaboratively. As with all forms of research, action research involves the gathering and interpreting of data. A systematic approach to the investigative process involves critical reflection and the planning for further action. New understandings emerge as the situation is evaluated. From this a change process occurs.

Masters (2000) describes three types of action research, technical action research, practical action research and emancipative action research. Technical action research is a scientific method for solving practical

problems and results in the accumulative of predictive knowledge as well as the refinement of an existent theory (Lewin, 1947).

Practical action research is research into current and ongoing practice by practitioners for practitioners. Action and research are combined as a single process that involves repeated cycles of planning, acting, observing, and re planning (Kemmis & Mc Taggart, 1981).

Emancipative action research is a participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowledge. It seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others (Reason and Bradbury, 2001).

Wadsworth (1991) describes an action evaluation research process which is built on similar concepts of participation. Participatory action research allows room for participants to play as large or as small a role in the action research process as they feel comfortable.

Peters (1991) describes a process known as DATA – describe, analyse, theorize and act. In the first stage, teachers describe a practice that represents a critical aspect of their work. During the analysis stage, teachers look at their assumptions and beliefs in regards to this practice. In the theorizing, stage alternative ways of approaching the practice are explored. In the act stage the new theories are put into action. Action research can become an everyday process in teaching and learning practice. Action research adds another layer to the reflective practice process as teachers continually work on improving practice.

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Goodfellow and Hedges (2007) describe action research as a problematic methodology. Action research ‘packages’ often work with a quick step-by-step approach, which act more as a recipe than a form of research. Findings are often kept in the context with which they occurred and not offered for consideration by other practitioners. Moreover, the action research approach may avoid the critical component that may challenge the way practices are performed.

### **3:3 A shift from action research to practitioner research**

A shift from the concept of action research to practitioner research allows a forum for critical reflection to occur. Practitioner research is viewed as a process that is intended to improve practice in a specific context. Practitioner research is driven by the concept of teaching being a research-based profession with there being a desire to bridge the gaps between research, policy, theory and practice (Goodfellow & Hedges, 2007).

Practitioner research is seen as a process that focuses on praxis and practitioners taking a lead role in research activity in their own early childhood context. Two conflicting ideas began to appear in practitioner research. Goodfellow & Hedges (2007) describes Stenhouse’s (1975) view that teachers would still need the support of a more experienced ‘expert’. Collaborative inquiry can be enhanced by the presence of an outside researcher or facilitator (Goodfellow & Hedges, 2007). The added presence of an outside researcher gives a new kind of personal and professional contribution to the group. Different levels of reciprocal

exchange and perspectives are drawn out by the researcher. Data gathering becomes part of the research process. Conclusions may be more easily drawn as someone observes from the outside, and they may have access to relevant literature. Theories and insights of the collaborative team may also be more easily identified.

Heron & Reason (2001) advocated for a collaborative approach. In this approach everyone who was involved in the research process were seen as co-researchers, engaged in all decision-making that was involved in the research experience (Goodfellow & Hedges, 2007). Mitchell (2003) describes practitioner inquiry as on a continuum from reflective practice through to well-theorised research projects.

The idea of teachers researching their practice is one that is becoming more common in early childhood education in New Zealand, especially with the introduction of the Centres of Innovation program (Meade, 2003). Heron and Reason (2001), promoted a collaborative approach to research, exploring the concept of teachers as 'co-researchers'.

Fish (1998) and Goodfellow (2001) discuss that practitioners need opportunities to interpret professional knowledge, investigate assumptions and beliefs and analyse their everyday practices.

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999, cited in Goodfellow & Hedges, 2007, p. 190) discuss three frameworks in practitioner research, which they state are social inquiry, ways of knowing within communities, and practical inquiry.

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Firstly, in the social inquiry approach knowledge is constructed through collaboration with others. Secondly the 'way of knowing in communities' considers the creation of a culture of inquiry and theory building, as an agency of change. Finally, practical inquiry focuses on the teachers' personal/practical knowledge, so that inquiry will effectively enhance the teachers' practical knowledge.

Goodfellow & Hedges (2007) discuss a 'blurring of the boundaries' between everyday teaching practice, professional development and research. They suggest that the building of an inquiry process is of utmost importance.

### **3:4 Method**

The researcher is a member of the registration group, and for the purpose of this study the researcher will take responsibility for the collection, analysis and interpretation of data. The context of this investigation is set in a monthly one hour group registration meeting. Written teacher reflection and group discussion will act as data for this investigation.

There is a sociocultural underpinning to the method of this investigation. It is viewed that this meeting time will provide an opportunity for individual teachers to interpret knowledge, investigate assumptions and analyse their everyday practices in the context of the group learning process. The individual teacher will be involved in their own practical inquiry. This will occur through a repeated process of discussion and written reflection. The

teachers will have opportunities to reflect on their personal/practical knowledge, and in turn this may effectively enhance their practical knowledge. In the investigation the teachers will have possible opportunities to become more analytically critical of their own values, beliefs and assumptions. The group approach to registration will act as a context for a possible inquiry process to occur. Collaboration is viewed as a central aspect of the group inquiry process. As practitioners explore their practice together as a team new theories may be constructed.

It will be the role of the researcher to record, document and feed back to the teachers the group inquiry, and any new theories that are constructed by the group. Refer to the analysis and discussion chapter (chapter five) for the steps taken to explain how the researcher moved from the raw data to the conclusions.

### **3:5 Data collection and analysis**

Grounded theory acts as the theoretical framework which underpins the data analysis process and methods. Data comparison acts as a key concept to the data analysis process. It was the role of the researcher to analyse the new data as it emerges. Glaser (1978) describes the importance in comparing emerging data and emerging literature.

Sociocultural theory guided the data collection and analysis process. Individual teachers photocopied only the aspects of their written reflections that they wanted the researcher to read (see appendix two). Teachers submitted their written reflections if they wished. As well as



these teachers reflections, there were also group minutes taken from the meeting, as well the researchers own written reflections that were made after each meeting. The group minutes were noted down by a different teacher each time, thus giving a slightly different perspective each time the minutes were recorded.

### **3:6 Centre participation and ethical considerations**

The overall permission for this investigation to proceed was granted by the Ethics Committee at the Christchurch College of Education, as it was formerly known. On applying for ethical approval the main consideration was what possible danger may occur for the participants connected with this research investigation. An information and consent form was given to all members of the group to read and sign, if they wished to be a part of this investigation.

Some ethical dilemmas that became apparent were questions such as, might the research process limit the teachers from expressing themselves, knowing that every word they say could be made public? Might the research process intrude on the teacher's professional development? These are very real concerns and ones that were discussed fully with each individual teacher before proceeding. Once their individual approval had been gained this was once again discussed in the first meeting.

Darlington & Scott (2002) discuss that it can, at times be difficult in the data to disguise the setting or the participants, especially to those familiar

with the field of research. For the sake of privacy, confidentiality and anonymity none of the participants are named in this report, instead pseudonyms have been used.

It was recognised that tensions between my roles as head teacher, registration tutor and researcher might arise. I was accountable to the Christchurch College of Education Ethics Committee to ensure that no harm came to the teachers.

### **3:7 The community in which the investigation is set**

The early childhood setting in which this investigation is set, is situated in a low socio-economic community in the South Island of New Zealand. The early childhood education centre is a community run preschool where the philosophy is that all profits go back into the running of the preschool. The centre caters for 31 children from birth to six years old.

At the time of this investigation the early childhood education centre had a total staff of ten, although not all of these teachers were in the registration group. Six of these teachers were qualified with a Bachelor of Teaching and Learning degree. One teacher was in training, one teacher was untrained and worked in a support role, one was administrative staff, and one a part-time art teacher.

### **3:8 The participants in the investigation**

Of the total teachers in the early childhood setting all of the five qualified teachers plus one teacher still in training were participants in this investigation.

In the beginning of the registration process, a degree of networking occurred with outside teachers. A previous teacher from this centre was invited to join the group registration process. A fully registered work colleague of hers visited one of the registration discussion group meetings to see how the process was performed. She then took this knowledge back to her centre and another combined registration group occurred in that centre. Once the registration programme became well established in the other early childhood education setting the teacher transferred her registration process to her own centre.

The monthly registration meeting was also visited on one occasion by a member of the New Zealand Teachers Council, as the researcher had been in communication with the Teachers Council regarding our registration group process. A member of the Teachers' Council sat in with one of our meetings as she was keen to see the group registration process in action. In discussion after the meeting, the member of the Teacher's Council said that she found the group process seemed to work well. The researcher was keen to hear the Teachers Council representative's feedback as at the time of this investigation the group approach was not commonly adopted.

### **3:9 Structuring the report**

Five emergent research cycles occurred in this investigation. Chapter four describes all of the action research cycles as they occurred in chronological order, from October 2004 to Dec 2005. Discussion, reflection, documentation and facilitation feature in this investigative chapter. Chapter five highlights assumptions and challenges that arose from the investigation. Chapter six is the discussion chapter where key findings are explored. Chapter seven is the conclusion chapter.

## **Chapter Four: The investigation**

### **4:1 Introduction**

This chapter covers the action research period of the investigation which ran from October 2004 to December 2005, and summarizes the main findings that were derived from the data. Teachers were sought permission (see appendix one for a copy of the consent form). The teaching dimensions were covered in the first meeting (see appendix two). Minutes were taken at each meeting (refer appendix three). Extracts from my journal entries (appendix four), and the teacher's journal entries (appendix five) give evidence of the data. Different sections of data in this report represent a separate action research cycle. By separating the overall investigation into sections, it illustrates how action research was an ongoing process.

A learning story (Carr, 2001) technique is used in the reporting of this chapter. This means that each section of this chapter tells a story, and that the analysis is partly 'woven' into the story.

### **4:2 Description of the first three month discussion cycle**

The first meeting, in October 2004, acted as an introductory meeting to the registration process. Commonly agreed rules were discussed. The second meeting which was held in November 2004, and started by the teachers reflecting on their previous group discussion. Teachers wrote brief notes between meetings that related to the meeting topic. By the third meeting,

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in December 2004, the teachers used their reflective notes as a point of reference for their discussion.

*First meeting: 26 October 2004. Facilitator – Registration tutor*

The focus of the first meeting was an introduction to the advice and guidance program that the group would be working on together. Teachers were provided with information regarding the registration process which was taken directly from the New Zealand Teachers Council website. The teachers said they were pleased to receive this information about the registration process as it was often difficult to access material regarding this process.

The main discussion in the meeting surrounded an analysis of the language of a report, called - *The capable teacher* (Education Review Office, 1998). The four teaching dimensions in the teacher registration process were discussed in this paper - professional knowledge, professional practice, professional relationships and professional leadership. The teaching dimensions tended to have a primary sector teaching focus. The group evaluated professional knowledge in this first meeting and partially evaluated professional practice. Initial comments made by the teachers, about the report were that the primary sector focus sounded 'cold, scientific, and clinical'. It was the initial task of the group, therefore, to review the four teaching dimensions in light of early childhood education and also specifically in the context of their early childhood education setting.

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A discussion took place as to how the teachers' registration group process would be facilitated. The teachers decided that a process of shared facilitation would occur in a similar way to the weekly staff meetings.

Overall, the teachers seemed to display an initial eagerness with their registration process. At the end of the first meeting one of the teachers, Anne, said that "this is going to be a really great process, and we are going to be amazing teachers". The group appointed Anne as the person to facilitate the next meeting. She said the group would carry on discussing the teaching dimensions at the next meeting.

*Second meeting: 30 November 2004. Facilitator - Anne*

The focus of the next meeting was a discussion on professional practice. Teachers viewed teaching and learning as a continuous process of evaluation of their own learning. The teachers considered that the purpose of the registration group was to encourage and assist each other and to identify professional development needs. The group also acknowledged the importance of contributing to the professional development activities of their colleagues. Teachers viewed themselves as part of a continuous program of evaluating ones own teaching, and favoured a discussion pattern that was group-led rather than facilitator-led.

Individual members of the group each read out a teaching dimension, and the group discussed whether they felt it represented what they do, or whether the wording needed to be changed. Debate would occur, with the group finally all agreeing on how it should be re written. Some of the

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changes to the language of professional practice that were rewritten, related to early childhood education practice as more about 'extending children's learning' than 'setting adult-led objectives' for children to fulfil. The teachers talked about less directive language. For example they decided the phrase 'insists on' could be better said using 'encourages' instead. The teachers viewed children's behaviour as 'positive', rather than behaviour being 'desirable'. The teachers continued to discuss and debate the differences between the school sector bias in the Education Review Office (1998) report and their own early childhood practices.

Teachers began to relate to their own teaching practice in the discussion. As an example Anne talked about having concerns when dealing with a certain child's behaviour and asked if others were having the same difficulties. She was very open as to how she encountered difficulty with the child, and she wondered if all the teachers use the same strategies as her. She asked how others handled this child's behaviour. Members of the group shared with Anne how they dealt with this child's behaviour.

Sue shared her enjoyment for reading current early childhood theoretical literature when she was a student. She reflected that she does not do a lot of that now and that it would be good to develop articles on relevant early childhood education practice. Sue was keen to take on the role of facilitator for the following meeting, and decided the group should continue working through the teaching dimensions.



*Third meeting: 16<sup>th</sup> December 2004. Facilitator- Sue*

The teachers evaluated professional relationships and professional leadership, and discussed the idea of responding to feedback from peers. Some of the teachers said that they had difficulty with their practice being critiqued by someone else. The teachers also displayed concern with evaluation in regards to their practice. As a group, they seemed uncomfortable with the term 'critical reflection', preferring instead to use the term 'open feedback'. In the discussion on the teaching dimension of professional leadership, the teachers acknowledged that they did not link leadership with individual areas of expertise. Teachers stated that they viewed everyone in the teaching team as holding responsibility and expertise in all areas of the curriculum.

During a discussion on how documentation of teaching and learning practices reflects the knowledge and understanding of *Te Whāriki*, the early childhood education curriculum (Ministry of Education, 1996), Cathy discussed bringing back the direct language of *Te Whāriki* into the centre assessment documentation. By this, Cathy meant quoting the strands, goals and learning outcomes, instead of just referring to *Te Whāriki*. This was a practice that had not been occurring in the area of assessment for sometime in this centre. Instead teachers were indirectly using the language of the curriculum document.

This was the first time that the group had not agreed on something and the first time that any form of individual preferences in the centre program

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was discussed. The teachers were asked to reflect on five areas in which they wanted to improve their individual practice for the next year, and five areas that they would like to see the group discuss during the following year.

The idea of reflecting on five areas of individual and group improvement was introduced by me as the discussion on the teaching dimensions was coming to an end. It was important for me as the registration tutor to gain an overall idea of what direction the teachers wanted the discussion process to go in. By identifying individual goals, it gave teachers individual direction. By identifying group goals it gave group direction.

#### **4:3 Description of the second three month cycle of strengthened discussion and introduction of narrative reflection**

This section explores the period from late March to May 2005. The teachers had not had a meeting since December 2004. By the end of the first cycle the teachers had completed their analysis of the teaching dimensions. This section sees the teachers reflective practice shift from using a brief note taking form of written reflection, to the introduction of a narrative form of reflective writing.

*Fourth meeting: 31<sup>st</sup> March 2005. Facilitator - Cathy*

Each teacher had completed their reflections on five areas of individual professional development and five areas of group professional

development that they wanted to work on during the up coming year. This information was then given to me, as their registration tutor, and I compared and categorised it into the most common areas of interest, to the least common. This information was then reported back to the teachers at the beginning of this next meeting. I used a process I now call the 'common anonymous voice'. I refer to this as the 'common anonymous voice' because it represented the thoughts of the group as a whole, while not mentioning anyone's name individually.

As this group of teachers worked closely alongside each other in the every day program, it was important that the discussion and reflection in the registration group did not unduly disrupt their daily working relationships. Therefore it was decided by me that any individual information given to me, or recorded by me will remain anonymous so as to cause a less amount of disruption amongst the group. Teachers would have a general idea of who said what, but names were not attached to any individual information that was then reported to the group. In this way the source of all individual information remained confidential. It's also important to note at this stage that the reporting of the 'common anonymous voice' (a concept that becomes significant to this investigation) also seems to compare to the way the teachers have been interpreting one 'common form of practice' in their early childhood setting.

A variety of topics were discussed during the March 2005 meeting, all of which directly came from the reflection of each teacher on the five areas

of individual and group professional development. The topics were generally practical everyday issues, as well as issues that the teachers thought needed group consistency or agreement.

Teachers used this time to reflect on individual children's behaviour, working with parents, and providing a welcoming environment for centre families. Teachers used the meeting time to vent frustrations they encountered when relating to centre parents. They discussed that amazing work may have occurred for a child during the day, but if the smaller detail of not having the child's shoes ready is not addressed then parents will not be in an ideal frame of mind to hear about their child's achievements.

Practical every day issues such as the same children having very few learning story assessments were discussed. All of the teachers admitted that they were not noticing these children to the level that they felt they should be. The teachers then observed how the parents of these same children seem to participate less in the program and they reflected on this. Teachers reflected that when they share less learning stories with the parents, the communication between parent and teachers is limited.

Some teachers described how they found it difficult talking to some parents. All of the teachers acknowledged that they didn't know all the parents' names and that this could be something for all of them to work on as a group. Pro-active suggestions were given regarding listing children's and parents' names to help each other remember all parents first names.

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Behaviour management ended up becoming the general focus for the March discussion. Teachers tried to agree on one way of performing certain behaviour management strategies as they believed consistency was important for the children to understand what they can and can not do. Teachers wanted to have specific rules for what is and is not acceptable behaviour. They wanted to seek continuity between the behaviour management practices that individual teacher's used. Two practical and specific examples of practices that the teachers wanted consistency on were whether or not children were allowed to climb the trees at the centre, and whether children could climb up the slide.

After much discussion and debate, the teachers still did not agree on a solution for these two practices, and so it was decided to continue this discussion on to the next meeting. Teachers said that they would reflect on this area of difference during the month and bring their ideas and suggestions to the next meeting.

*Fifth meeting: 28<sup>th</sup> April 2005. Facilitator - Donna*

Discussion of the behaviour management practices led the April 2005 discussion. Not all teachers contributed to this discussion. Those teachers that did speak talked about the need for children to be able to find out for themselves what their own limits and boundaries were. Only a few teachers initially responded to these comments. It became evident that there was not going to be a consensus. There were still some teachers who chose not to contribute to the discussion.

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The decision amongst those that did contribute to the discussion was that the centre should have climbing trees and non-climbing trees, depending on the strength of the tree. This discussion on behaviour management took up almost the entire meeting, and at the end of it teachers decided that there were some behaviour management strategies that they would just have to “agree to disagree on”.

At the end of the April meeting I had suggested that the teachers write full narrative reflections after each meeting. By a ‘full narrative reflection’ I mean that each teacher was encouraged to write a full A4 page reflection on what had been said in the registration discussion. I introduced this reflective writing process because up until now there had been very little written reflection carried out by the teachers. My concern was that if this continued the teachers would not have any written record of the registration process. A secondary concern was that I felt that teachers could be reflecting at a more in-depth level. My hope was that the written reflective process would support a deeper level of reflection.

*Sixth meeting: 31<sup>st</sup> May 2005. Facilitator – Donna*

By the May meeting the communication in the registration meeting seemed to take on another level. Not only were the teachers discussing on a monthly basis but they were now reflecting on a written level.

Although the group had agreed to disagree on the controversial behaviour management practices, and the topic had left the discussion group process, it had apparently not left the minds of the teachers. The introduction of Making meaning: A team of early childhood education teachers working towards registration from a group perspective.

narrative writing seemed to allow the teachers to have a process, whereby, they could continue reflecting on points raised within the discussion group process.

One example of the depth of writing that was occurring is from an excerpt from Sue's journal reflections (as below) that were written after the May 2005 meeting.

In Sue's reflective story, she discussed how she had been looking forward to the next meeting to see if everyone agreed on the new rules that had been decided at the last meeting. She talked about agreeing on almost everything that was discussed and then said the following:

*There was one issue that I wanted to address [she discusses a practice about children sharing the one bike] I was under the understanding that this was ok. Yet when I went outside and this was occurring, another teacher told me I should not be allowing it as it is not ok. I checked with some other teachers and they said it was fine. I could not remember if we had raised this in the previous meeting.*

It appears that there are differences between what is being agreed on in the registration meeting, and what is occurring in the everyday practice. Some teachers seem unable to say that they disagree with the decisions that occur in the meeting.

Sue continues in her journal reflections to explain that when she raised this issue in the meeting the teacher who disagreed with the behaviour in the everyday program, did not voice this disagreement in the meeting:

*So I brought it up in the meeting and everyone said it was fine of course. The teacher who had disagreed said nothing! I felt a bit uncomfortable about this as I didn't want her to feel like I was directing the question for her benefit... I really just wanted to be clear that we all felt the same way... I wanted to use this opportunity to discuss why she felt it was not ok, but perhaps she felt because we were all in accordance that she did not want to go against the grain.*

Sue writes in her journal about her hopes for the meeting, that teachers will feel secure and safe enough to share their thoughts, especially if these thoughts differ from the entire teaching team.

#### **4:4 Description of a one month cycle of strengthened written narratives**

By now teachers were reflecting at a deep level and giving these reflections to the registration tutor. This section explores the events of June 2005.

This section cites individual teacher comments that were drawn from their reflective writing. It is interesting to see the correlation between the individual nature of these comments and an individual approach to viewing practice that is occurring in the discussion group.

This cycle is only one month long and shows how the previous data has provoked theorising around the concept of two types of practice in the group – collaborative and collective practice.



*Seventh meeting: 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2005. Facilitator – Kirsty*

From previous discussions that were focusing on teachers' holding differing philosophical views on behaviour management, it was decided that in the teachers' journal reflections they would reflect on the two terms - collaborative and collective. Each teacher's interpretation of these two terms is reported on separately.

In Cathy's reflective journal collaborative practice meant drawing on each others strengths and supporting each others weaknesses. Working together in partnership was highlighted. Cathy's view of collective practice was that teachers may join as a group and share a common interest, but that does not mean that they come together in harmony for a common outcome. Cathy clearly stated that she wished that all teachers would work collaboratively together.

Sue viewed collaborative practice as a process of working with another, a supportive team effort, and a process of joint partnership. Her interpretation of collective practice was a process of negotiation and agreement which arises through a majority decision. Sue also stated that she preferred the term collaborative practice.

In Anne's journal reflections she described collaborative practice as being related to a group working towards a common purpose, who shares the same vision or end product. Anne thought the term collective took a bit more thought, and she finally saw it as a deep understanding and awareness of each other and their values. She noted that this is not needed

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in a collaborative approach. Anne did not state which approach, if any, was her preference.

In Donna's journal reflections she viewed collaborative practice as everyone working together on the basis of consensus. It often involves a 'majority wins' process where compromises are made. Donna said that collaborative practice was needed for a sound form of decision making to take place so that an overall quality service was provided. She said that there are times when the only way to maintain continuity for children is to take a collaborative approach.

Collective practice was viewed by Donna as and when individual practice and values were maintained when working in a group. It allowed for individual strengths, diversity and variety. It also allowed for the sharing of ideas that other teachers have not thought of. Donna described how in her mind, both practices are vital in a team as there are times when the practices of individual teachers can be, and should be, fostered and other times when practice can only work to a common goal. If the teachers always worked from a collective perspective then it is difficult to establish rules, and maintain regulation standards and policy.

Donna explained that everyone needed to know that they have a voice and that it is safe to express their own philosophy. She stated that someone can work collaboratively with people they do not know well, and that complete strangers can work together for a common goal. However there is a degree of intimacy involved between parties before a collective

approach can work. This led her to think about the question - what happens when teachers act collectively and philosophies oppose each other?

Donna described how she feels a collaborative approach was in operation in the registration group, and a collective approach is in operation in the every day teaching practice. She critiqued these two approaches by saying that one of the disadvantages of these approaches is that not all teachers' voices can be heard in the registration group process. When all teachers work collaboratively compromises have to be made. Donna said that when she does not don't feel strongly about a topic she is happy to go with the majority and does not always feel it is necessary to voice the same ideas, and work in a collaborative manner.

Kirsty described collaborative practice as being used in the programme but may change or be forgotten over times as individual's opinions or philosophies change, and there may not be a great deal of room for everyone to have their say or get their ideas across. Kirsty's description of collective practice was about understanding that each person has strengths which when utilised, can teach other teachers, parents and children. Kirsty sees that the collective view works as a community and the individual teacher enjoys passing on her strengths and knowledge to people and children who are interested.

Kirsty's view of collective practice valued reflection as playing an integral role in a collective community, and is evident in this following excerpt from her May 2005 reflective journal

*Therefore as a team we are all reflecting, drawing and valuing everyone as equal teachers or of similar philosophy and supporting each others strengths, while understanding each others weaknesses. The collective of teaching and learning styles needs to understand and value the reflection process as individual person's ideas, which are reflected as just that, to be considered and re reflected on as a collective group. Everyone in the group must be understood and recognised as having some value in what they personally see as meaningful teaching and learning. The collective group can draw on everyone's ideas and reflect to create excitement and change to work towards quality practice.*

As teachers explore the two terms collaborative practice and collective practice, it is allowing them to begin to define their differing views in regards to practice within their centre. Interestingly, only the two teachers, who identified with the collaborative approach, clearly articulated their one preference for practice. The other teachers were not as sure of their preference, and one teacher clearly stated that both practices were purposeful. The other two teachers, while possibly describing a preference for collective practice, did not feel that they had to state this strongly in their reflections. Appendix Eight shows a further defining of the term

collective practice, and shows some of the researchers 'scribbles' as she tries to analyse the group meaning of collective practice.

#### **4:5 Description of two month cycle highlighting concerns**

This section explores data between July and August 2005. An action research model emerges which illustrates the role of group discussion, and individual reflection. The action of individuals sharing written reflections with me as the facilitator was strengthened by comparing, categorising and reporting these anonymous reflections back to group. This 'reflexive' action research process that emerged at this point became a key contribution to this investigation. The term 'reflexive', as mentioned above, describes a process of 'repeated reflection' that was beginning to occur at this stage. Teachers were not simply individually reflecting, but were also re-reflecting on the group information that was reported back to them by the registration tutor.

As this in-depth communication process developed, differences between teaching philosophies became more apparent, both in the written and verbal communications of the group. Some teachers had difficulty expressing this in the registration discussion process and chose instead to use their reflective journals to describe their difficulty in confronting these differences. Teachers may have been unsure about raising these issues in the registration group, fearing they might disrupt everyday working relationships.

*Eighth meeting: 28<sup>th</sup> July 2005. Facilitator – Cathy*

The data is taken from the teachers reflective journals (see appendix five), which, by this stage were in-depth. After the written reflections were handed to the tutor they were categorised into themes. The teacher writing was reflecting earlier discussions on collaborative and collective practice (see appendix six and seven). The registration tutor then fed these themes back to the group through an anonymous process. The teachers and researcher theorised about these new emerging themes (see appendix eight for information that was fed back to the group and researcher thoughts). Other concepts developed such as the importance of working together as a group (see appendix nine). Teachers' reflected on their own individual reflective practice (see appendix ten). As teachers thought more about collaborative and collective practice comments relating to accepting diversity of teaching practice developed (see appendix eleven). Teachers were beginning to write about how they viewed the registration process (see appendix twelve).

All teachers were continued to be given a copy of the anonymous themes that had emerged from the individual reflections. It was evident from the teacher reflections that there were concerns that were not being addressed in the registration meeting. Cathy's main concerns were that there were some teachers who were not speaking up in the registration meeting. She talked about the need to be aware of others teaching philosophies, and being aware of how other colleagues like to be approached. She asked

herself whether it is acceptable to negate someone else's true beliefs, and she hopes she would not. She talked about it being important to look at other teachers 'special gifts' and to respect these. Cathy stated that, "We are all teachers as well as learners".

The focus of Sue's concerns was when meaning is misconstrued in the registration group. She acknowledged that "we are all individuals and as such interpret things differently". Sue described how if she was in the meeting and she said she wanted to be firmer with the children all of the teachers might have differing definitions of what 'firmness' means, and may come to the conclusion that she's not 'practising what she preaches', even though she truly thought she was being firmer and actively practised this.

Sue wanted the teachers in the registration meeting to reach the point where they could be frank with each other. However, she felt there were certain issues that were too hurtful to address with certain teachers, no matter how tactful one may be.

Anne discussed differences among the teachers, and stated that the registration group has made her accepting of these differences. Anne's concern was the fact that she felt there were poor practices amongst the teachers. She was not sure whether to write about them would help, because she said she would not address them directly in the group. She did not feel that it was her place. Anne saw that there was a lack of consistency in the program, and this bothered her. She also questioned

whether there was enough personal role modelling of good practice in the centre, or perhaps, there was a culture of people not respecting each other. She described how poor practices and attitudes were always going to be just that, until they change. Anne stated that “it is hard to raise these issues as a group, but then again if that is what registration is about we need to find ways or a way of addressing them”.

Donna was concerned about a surface level of discussion occurring in the group and that a lot of what was being said involved ‘buzz’ words that always pop up. For example, “when we say, we are working as a team”. She wondered if changes would actually be made. Donna continued to explain that she tended to not want to “rock the boat”, and had difficulty accepting weakness in others. She is concerned as to whether she is a very effective communicator, because she does not take the brave step and speak out. She viewed the registration group meeting as making her think about her practice.

#### **4:6 Description of a three month cycle, looking at intrapersonal, interpersonal, and community learning**

This section explores the period from September to November 2005 (the final three months of the investigation). The teachers were offered a set of questions to act as a guideline over the next three month period (see appendix thirteen). The three month reflective questioning process was underpinned by the three analytical lenses of Rogoff (2003). The teachers



were familiar with the meaning of these lenses through previous teacher as researcher work they had participated in (Wright, Ryder & Mayo, 2006).

During September the teachers critically reflected on their own practice using an intra-personal lens (Rogoff, 2003). In October, the teachers reflected on their practice in relation to their colleagues through an interpersonal lens (Rogoff, 2003). In November, the teachers used Rogoff's (2003) cultural/historical lens to reflect on how early experiences and current day experiences influenced practice.

At each monthly meeting the teachers openly shared about themselves through Rogoff's (2003) lenses, having previously written in their reflective journals. The reflections would then be given to me, as the registration tutor, either directly after the meeting or up to a week later.

The regular concept of using comparison and categorisation as a research tool meant that at the end of each month, comparisons would be drawn between the different teacher's analysis of their own practice, or their view of the practice of others. By the end of the 3 month process it allowed a layering of analysis to occur. Firstly, a strengthened picture developed of each individual teacher, and secondly, a strengthened comparison formed across the three analytical lenses. This formed a strengthened picture of the teachers as a group. As the teachers undertook this process of reflexive practice (Cole & Knowles, 2000), difference and diversity in early influences and teacher practice was demonstrated.

#### *Individual reflective practice viewed through a sociocultural lens*

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To demonstrate the difference and diversity in the way the teachers made meaning of their practice, the reflective writing of two teachers in the registration program will be highlighted in this section. Both teachers openly explore their individual assumptions and beliefs, and demonstrate a high level of critical reflection and critical theorising on practice as they dug below the surface and illuminate their contrasting views of practice.

Both the socio-cultural perspective of the three analytical lenses of Rogoff, (2003) and the autobiographical project concept of Cole & Knowles (2000) underpinned the investigation of these final few months.

Cole and Knowles (2000) look at learning as being a life long process which consists of an ongoing inquiry into self, contexts and relationships. Similarities can be drawn between the two theoretical approaches where both explore self (intrapersonal), contexts (cultural/historical) and relationships (interpersonal). Cole and Knowles (2002) encourages a process whereby to know ourselves as people is very much a part of knowing ourselves as professionals.

#### *Sue's reflexive look at early experiences and current day practice*

Early memories reminded Sue that she did not always enjoy her school days. She remembered that a favourite school teacher role models the type of values she wanted to display in her own teaching, such as supporting the shy or timid children in the early childhood setting. Sue discussed the importance of identifying personal history and how it influences current practice:

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An interpersonal lens (Rogoff, 2003) helped Sue identified that she tended to prefer a collaborative form of practice. It was very important for Sue to support her colleagues and for everyone to agree on all decisions made about practice in the early childhood education setting before any changes were made. In Sue's reflections she commented that there was one particular colleague that she regularly sought out help and guidance from. The guidance she sought was from a colleague who she trusted and who has practices that were similar to her own. She felt that her colleague was approachable in regards to discussing areas of practice that needed developing. A process of interconnectedness occurred between these two teachers as similar practices were discussed and affirmed. Sue also has no problems talking with others, especially the centre parents. Although, she said she does talk more to the parents of the shy children.

A cultural/institutional lens (Rogoff, 2003) allowed Sue to view the registration discussion group process as a forum for becoming aware of other teachers philosophies and practices. Sue described that she has gained more understanding of her colleagues practice as they have been able to articulate their practice in the discussion group process. Sue found the registration group process offered a forum for discussion on relevant teaching and learning issues and helped her reflect on practices that were similar to her own, as well as practices that she found 'unhelpful' in the teaching team. From a broader perspective of the group, appendices twelve and

thirteen show the teachers thinking about the registration group and how it was helpful (or otherwise) to their individual professional development process.

An example of a practice that Sue found unhelpful was the changing of the environment without full consultation with the rest of the teaching team. These can be shown in the following excerpt from Sue's journal in November 2005

*There are some communication practices that I don't feel are helpful. For instance taking the initiative to rearrange the environment and not consulting with everybody. It's great to initiate change, but it would be helpful if it was discussed with all colleagues why they feel something should change and then giving their proposal on how it should change. By working independently without consultation I feel it goes against team cohesion and decision making.*

*Kirsty's reflexive look at early experiences and current day practice*

Kirsty viewed the idea of individual teachers having the power to make changes in the curriculum as being beneficial as long as the changes were for the overall well being of the learning community. Discussion was a significant process to Kirsty's decision making. In the following excerpt from Kirsty's reflective journal in November 2005 she offered a model of collective/reflective practice. A process of decision making was seen as being inclusive of all members of the learning community – children, teachers and parents.

*If a collective decision is formed then in practice out in the centre it should be valued and used to create meaningful and enjoyable learning for the children, teachers and parents... It should be re discussed in the meeting forum, if change is to occur in the practice, so as to allow us to all work as a community collective.*

An *intra-personal* lens (Rogoff, 2003), allowed Kirsty to recall happy memories of her childhood and admits that she still sometimes feels like a child and enjoyed identifying with fun happy times. Kirsty admitted that forming relationships can be hard sometimes and she would like to have more confidence, especially around talking with the centre parents. Kirsty was very open when she said that she sets very high standards for herself, “ones that perhaps are too much to expect everyone else to adhere to”.

From an *inter-personal* perspective (Rogoff, 2003), Kirsty tried to value everyone’s qualities and special individual strengths. She looked to a number of her colleagues for different parts of their practice that she admired. She said she approached those people whose practice she admired because they responded with respect.

From a *cultural/institutional* lens (Rogoff, 2003), the registration group has allowed Kirsty to understand other’ previous histories, allowing her to understand their practice and be less judgmental of different forms of practice

By reviewing these two teacher’s practice it is clear that they identified with different views on practice. As these differences emerged during the

discussion process it created a tension between teachers. As the diversity in practice become more distinguishable in the group discussions, so too did the teachers strategies for coping with the differences. Teachers used many strategies to unravel their assumptions and beliefs in regards to practice. Appendix eleven shows the teachers beginning to talk more about supporting diversity in their centre. Sue and Kirsty (as well as all of the teachers in the group) used a communicative action process that included reflective practice, facilitation, discussion, documentation, and action research. It can be seen that this *reflexive action research* process, helped the teachers to make meaning from their practice.

## **Chapter Five: Assumptions and challenges as a registration tutor and researcher**

### **5:1 Introduction**

In this chapter I use a personal voice to explore some of the initial assumptions I held, and challenges I faced during this investigation process. This chapter incorporates theory and reflection on the assumptions I held in regard to: practitioner inquiry, my role as registration tutor, and my role as researcher. As I worked alongside the teachers in this investigation further assumptions were challenged. An emergent methodology allowed these challenges to become significant influences on the direction of this investigation.

### **5:2 Theory in regards to exploring assumptions and beliefs**

Brookfield (1995) describes three types of assumptions that we as practitioners work with. Firstly, paradigmatic assumptions are seen as a way of 'making meaning of our wider world'. These assumptions are often difficult to recognise. Secondly, there are prescriptive assumptions which relate to 'what we think should be happening' in a situation. An example of this is how we should behave as teachers, and what quality education looks like. Thirdly, causal assumptions occur when thinking about 'how different processes work together'. These are sometimes the easiest set of assumptions to work through first, and ones that teachers working together in a teaching team would be working with every day.

Brookfield (1995) points out that the paradigmatic assumptions made Making meaning: A team of early childhood education teachers working towards registration from a group perspective.

about how we order our world, act as a background influence to our overall actions, behaviours and assumptions.

### **5:3 Reflections on my practice of exploring assumptions and beliefs**

When I began this investigation I was not aware of the paradigmatic assumptions I held, except that, I knew I held a philosophical belief in teaching and learning being a group, rather than an individual process. This belief was directly influenced from many years working in an early childhood teaching environment where many group learning prescriptive assumptions were being formed. My initial prescriptive assumptions that I brought into this inquiry directly relate to the concept that in early childhood education 'teachers work together as a collaborative team'. My causal assumptions relate to thinking that, if all teachers in an early childhood centre hold the same philosophical beliefs, that is working together as a team, then their practices should also look the same. This investigation challenged my assumptions in regard to the need to constantly work together as a team.

Because I held the prescriptive assumption that, we all work together as a collaborative team, I assumed that when the teachers were initially asked if they preferred an individual or group approach to registration process, they would all prefer a group approach. In hindsight, it is hard to know what the teachers would have preferred had they been given the choice. As

I was the only fully registered teacher at the time and also held the role of Making meaning: A team of early childhood education teachers working towards registration from a group perspective.



head teacher I was unable to provide a one-on-one registration advice and guidance program for each teacher, as time did not allow. Therefore, if all of the teachers were going to take part in a registration process at the same time, the group approach was the only option.

My prescriptive assumption of everyone working together as a collaborative team influenced my thinking that other teachers in this early childhood setting felt the same. I was to find that not all teachers held the same perspective on practice, and practice did not look the same for everyone. It has been seen in the previous chapter that two terms were attached to practice, one was 'collaborative', and the other was 'collective'. The term collective not only made meaning of the every day teaching and learning practice of these teachers, it also helped me to make meaning of different philosophical view points held by teachers (including myself) in the registration group. By defining practice into these two areas, my assumptions regarding practice were immediately challenged.

#### **5:4 Theory relating to the challenges of practitioner inquiry**

Goodfellow & Hedges, 2007 describe that when advocating for practitioner research there are many challenges that are apparent. These challenges fall within four general groupings - practical, personal, political and ethical (Scott, 2001).

Practical challenges are those day to day realities that restrict teachers from carrying out those additional tasks involved in research. Limited non-child contact hours are one of these practical challenges (Goodfellow  
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& Hedges, 2007). This means that practitioner research is often carried out during the teachers' day to day practices. Time to read relevant literature and emerging research data is a challenge, as is access to relevant literature. The inability to be able to easily access university libraries creates an added challenge.

Personal and political challenges are a reality for teachers who are researching the environment in which they teach. Quite often the researcher may also be the researched, this therefore creates juxtaposition of practitioner as researcher and practitioners are researched (Goodfellow & Hedges: 201). The concept of making one's own practices public can be an uncomfortable one. A political issue that may arise is the managing of the information when the findings turn out to be different from the expectations. Differences in interpretation are also another relevant political challenge, there by creating differences amongst the teaching team.

Ethical issues also become particular challenges for groups researching and working together (Goodfellow & Hedges, 2007). Issues such as informed consent can become a challenge when children and parents are involved. Issues of power exist as a challenge, that is, power over children, but also power of other teaching colleagues. The dual role of the teacher/researcher may lead to conflict of interest, and this may then affect the daily working environment of the practitioner team.

### **5:5 Reflections on the practice of exploring the challenges of practitioner inquiry**

The ethical and political challenge of being practitioner as researcher and researched created personal challenges for me, and could appear to be a conflict of interest. However it soon became evident to me that I was not a 'researched' participant in the registration group. It was at this point that I began to sit more comfortably with the role of registration tutor/researcher.

As the investigation continued a political challenge was becoming more evident. As the teachers began to describe practice as collaborative or collective, a dichotomy was emerging in the way practice was being viewed. As the practitioner inquiry process explored the two terms collaborative and collective practice, I was seeing a more complex description of practice developing in the practitioner research. This brought about another political challenge which was; that this was only my interpretation of what I thought was occurring. I was interpreting practice as an individual behaviour, collaborative group behaviour, and an individual reflective action. When teachers used reflective writing and discussion an active exploration of taken-for-granted assumptions was occurring. I termed this a reflective/collective practice.

Through the active exploration of taken-for-granted assumptions teachers made meaning of how their actions impacted on each other. It was important that I shared these thoughts with the teachers to get their thoughts and views on this multiple view of practice. Teachers responded

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that they could see that they carry out these different forms of practice depending on the current circumstances, and that there were some forms of practice they felt more comfortable in.

Teachers did not feel that they always needed to actively contribute to discussions. This posed a challenge to my assumption that teachers would always actively contribute, and if they didn't it meant there was something wrong with the communication process of the group. An ethical challenge that occurred was when I assumed that if there were any differences in the group that the teachers would openly explore them, due to the working relationship they have as colleagues. As different teaching strategies became discussed in the meetings, it seemed to become difficult for the group to reflect on each others practice.

It appeared that the teachers did not want to critically reflect on practice in the group forum for fear that it might disrupt the everyday working relationships. Positions of power in the group were becoming more evident. Power relations seemed to be connected to the type of practice that was being discussed and whether the majority or minority of teachers agreed with that practice. This created a challenge for me as the registration tutor, as I was unsure as to how to assist the communication process of the group. This lack of discussion was highlighted by me in my research journal. I wondered how the research process could assist these practical 'problems' occurring in the group communication process. The challenges allowed me to stand back from the inquiry and put on my

researchers hat, and consider where to from here. It was at this stage that the teachers were introduced to the concept of written reflections that they would share with me as their registration tutor.

I initially had no pre-conceived notion of what the reflective journal process would look like. This emerged from the investigation process. I assumed that the teachers would naturally be writing using a lengthy narrative format. Although the journal reflections emerged as the process developed, they became just as significant (if not more) than the discussion process. Teachers generally did appear to enjoy the written reflective process as an alternative means of communication. I assumed the teachers would keep some of their written thoughts to themselves, sharing only what they wanted with me as their registration tutor. I was surprised that as far as I knew I received everything that the teachers wrote in their journals.

#### **5:6 Reflections on the practice combining the role of registration tutor and researcher**

I assumed that this group of teachers would not respond to direct facilitation, preferring to direct the process themselves. When teachers were actually directed to perform their reflective journal writing, they seemed to find this to be a very effective form of communication. Many teachers used this as their preferred form of communication rather than the discussion group process. Direct facilitation by me would only occur when there was a gap in the flow of the meetings, and or when information had been categorised and compared. Teachers appeared to respond favourably

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to the research methods of 'compare, categorise and feedback' that I employed through out the investigation. Their following month's written reflections would always reflect on the information I had previously fed back to the group.

I assumed that my role in the registration process would be at the same participatory level as the other teachers and that this process would be as helpful for my own daily practice as it would be for others. I was to discover that I was not viewed as their colleague in the registration group discussions, other expectations were involved. This process was not for me to reflect on my own practice, rather to assist others to reflect on theirs. I assumed that I would not take a visible role as facilitator; rather the participatory action of the group would mean it facilitated itself. I was to discover very early on in the process that the teachers required a clear role from me, that is, as registration tutor/researcher. The more confident and proactive I became in this role, that is, categorising and comparing teacher reflections and feeding this information anonymously back to the group, the stronger the participation was of the group as a whole.

I assumed from a researcher's point of view I would act as a 'fly on the wall' and simply record the group process, and draw my analysis from those observations. I did not foresee action research playing a role. I was to discover that practice and (action) research were to play a very strong interconnecting role. My role was not just to record, my role was to use

what I recorded to assist the knowledge of the group, and in the process strengthen group knowledge of centre practice.

I began this process with the assumption that the methodology of this investigation somehow sat separately from the practice of the registration group. I was to discover that methodology is similar to early childhood centre philosophy in that it is methodology that guides the direction of the investigation, in the same way that it is philosophy that guides the centre practices. I initially assumed that action research as a methodology was too simplistic for this investigation process, and I was weary of following a pre-prescribed 'plan, act, do' process.

What I was to find was that action research challenged me right from the beginning. The idea of this inquiry being influenced strongly by action research was one I fought strongly against as I did not want a 'plan, act, do' methodology to act as direction for the teachers' inquiries that would occur in the discussion process. In actual fact I was to discover that a definite process of 'action' applied in this investigation process. Figure 2 in the next chapter illustrates *reflexive action research* as the cyclical action process that emerged as a framework to this registration process.

Practitioner research drove the investigative process, enabling four stages of inquiry to occur. The teachers participated in the first two stages in a process of practitioner inquiry. An intrapersonal perspective allowed teachers to explore their own practice, and an interpersonal perspective assisted them to explore the practice of the team. Practitioner research

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methods added further depth to the teacher's inquiries, as individual written reflections were compared and categorised. A fourth layer of inquiry was added as the reflections were made public and shared with the group.



## Chapter Six: Discussion

### 6:1 Introduction

This chapter discusses key findings and the strengths and weaknesses of this investigation. There were seven key findings that arose from this investigation. The key findings were 1) practitioner action research played a key role in the communication of the group, 2) discussion and written reflection provided the group with alternative forms of communication 3) shifts in group dynamics highlighted a move from the need to agree to an acceptance of diversity 4) teachers held individual beliefs and practices that contributed to the collective of teaching and learning 5) sociocultural theory acted as a means of analysis of individual and group practice, 6) responsive facilitation played a key role in the identification of multiple forms of practice, and 7) a *reflexive action research* framework emerged from the investigation that supports individual and group inquiry

### 6:1 Practitioner action research played a key role in the communication of the group

One of the major findings in this investigation was the role that practitioner action research played, in relation to the teachers' inquiry process. This investigation supported Keesing-styles & Hedges (2007), when they state that practitioner research extends on practitioner inquiries. In this investigation, systematic practitioner research methods of

categorising and comparing were adopted by the researcher to support, and strengthen, the teachers' inquiry process.

Action research emerged as a process of professional development. This process is similar to Cole and Knowles (2000), interpretation of reflexive inquiry. As knowledge is shared verbally and in written form, both individually and in the group, a reflexive communication process took place. This saw knowledge re reflect (reflex) back on itself, and as this process occurred, new knowledge was created. Participatory action research (Wadsworth, 1991), actively supported the communication process that emerged for individual teachers and the group as a team.

Group discussion acted as the starting point for the action research process. Teachers used written reflection to document their thoughts on the discussion. Initially this was an individual process, with these reflections then being shared with the registration tutor. The registration tutor then regularly categorised and compared across all of the teachers individual reflections. Individual and common areas of interest were identified. The registration tutor categorised these interests into general themes, and shared these overall themes back to the group at the next meeting. A process known as the 'common anonymous voice' was used to keep confidentiality within the group itself. The teachers re-discussed and re-reflected on these overall themes. New ideas for discussion emerged as the themes were re-discussed.

The action research approach that developed from this registration program was not reliant on a change process as an outcome. If changes in practices occurred it was solely from an individual teacher's perspective. The action research process that developed was about identifying, acknowledging and affirming the collective of practices, philosophies and beliefs held by the teachers in the registration program. The action research approach that emerged through this registration program, relied on a culture of participation, discussion, written reflection, and facilitation.

## **6:2 Discussion and written reflection provided the group with alternative forms of communication**

Throughout the investigation discussion played varying degrees of importance. As the teachers explored the meaning of professional knowledge, professional leadership, professional relationships and professional practice it was important for the teachers to discuss what they felt these dimensions looked like in their centre. As has been mentioned earlier, from the beginning, agreement on practice was essential before the registration discussion could move to the next aspect. This would mean therefore, that some discussion topics would last over two meetings, as with the behaviour management discussion.

Reflective writing was another form of communication that proved to be instrumental to the way teachers viewed their practice, both individually and as a group. Primarily the purpose of the written reflections was to allow the teachers to keep a record of their self-review process. As the teachers shared the written reflections with me as the registration tutor a

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picture of each teacher's self-review process was gained. A second (and more meaningful) purpose for the written reflections was that it allowed those teachers who felt they could not contribute to the discussion process, a chance to contribute using written reflection.

At times when verbal discussion was faltering the teachers turned to their written reflective form of communication and were able to continue to express themselves. The teachers were already confident reflective writers and therefore this was not an unusual form of communication for them. The teachers written reflections were used to gather a picture of what individual teachers were thinking about in regards to their practice.

Holly (1987) refers to the person writing in the journal as becoming both learner and teacher. This has been evident in this investigation, where the teachers' reflective writing was reported to the group. In this way, individual teacher's reflective thoughts have contributed to group knowledge and helped other teachers with the way they view their practice. The process of reflective writing has certainly been a humbling process, as mentioned by Holly (1987), for the teachers, as they have critiqued currently held assumptions and beliefs. The process of sharing these reflections with someone else was a humbling process for the teachers.

O'Connor & Diggins (2002), view journals as a personal and professional tool, that need to be substantial enough to enable reflection, yet allow the voice of the writer to be clearly apparent. This was also evident in the

reflections in this investigation where the move towards writing full narrative reflections enabled substantial reflection, while allowing individual teachers voice to be heard.

On a more practical note, written reflections acted as an authentic form of accountability of individual teacher's registration process. As individual teachers applied to the New Zealand Teachers Council for full registration, it was their written reflections that acted as evidence of their two year advice and guidance process.

The other benefit of the teachers written reflections was the depth by which I (as the registration tutor) got to know each teacher. I observed their practice on a daily basis, but it was the written reflections that allowed me to analyse each individual teacher's practice in more depth. I would call on this analysis if I was to provide evidence for the New Zealand Teachers Council of the teacher's registration program.

It became evident in this investigation that the discussion and written reflective process allowed for contribution and participation by all teachers at all times. There is not one teacher who did not participate by using either the written or verbal form of communication. The individual written reflections showed that there were times when a collaborative decision making process was important, and other times when it was just as valid to encourage and support individual teachers, collective practice. As a collective knowledge of practice emerged both in the written

reflections and the discussion process, each member of the group actively participated in the knowledge producing process.

By the end of the registration process the level of communication and discussion in the meeting had strengthened, as the teachers' confidently analysed their own practice. The teachers were still not completely confident in discussing their relationships with others, but the written reflections acted as another form of communication for the group. At the end of the investigation process 3 teachers had subsequently become registered and were beginning to mentor other teachers within the centre.

### **6:3 Shifts in group dynamics highlighted a move from the need to agree to an acceptance of diversity**

Another key finding in this investigation was the shifts that occurred in the development of the registration group. It appeared that the registration program moved through five phases of behaviour or action: group think, agree to disagree, individual disagreement, acceptance of disagreement and, finally, an overall appreciation of diversity of practice.

#### *Group think*

Initially, the data drawn from the discussions showed that the majority voice spoke the loudest. In this way it appeared that the loudest voice would influence how the group viewed practice and what form of practice would be adopted by the group. There appeared to be no place for the minority voice in this form of communication. The minority of teachers who did not agree with the majority discussion, made initial attempts at

communication. When these few teachers realised that they were not being heard they retreated to the periphery of the discussion process. At this initial stage the reflective writing had not been introduced, so teachers had no alternative form of communication to use.

Similarities were drawn between this investigation and stages of team development discussed in Rodd (1998). Similar issues such as belonging, inclusion, rejection, and teachers being unwilling to disclose personal concerns and weaknesses emerged in the initial stage of the registration group. As trust and security emerged in the registration group, individual members began to feel more comfortable with each other.

#### *Agree to disagree*

Although differences were occurring in how the teachers interpreted appropriate practice, agreement still seemed to overrule diversity. Initially, group agreement was so crucial to the culture of this group that the discussion could only move to a new topic when the teachers 'agreed to disagree'. Rodd (1998) discussed such group behaviours as 'group think' and a consensus approach to decision making. These processes were clearly evident in the registration group at the beginning.

#### *Individual disagreement*

Initially there appeared to be similarities with Rodd's (1998) second stage of team development, where everyone openly discusses practice. In hindsight, however, it could be seen that the only practice being discussed

in the registration group was that which was in common to the majority of the group (as mentioned earlier). As the written reflections from the teachers' journals were shared with the registration tutor, a different picture emerged regarding practice in this setting. The 'quiet voices' in the registration group who had sat on the periphery of the discussions, were revealing a different form of practice.

Practice can be viewed at times from a polarized perspective when teachers focus on their own individual practice. This happened for a short time during this investigative process. Disruption to the harmony of the group began to occur, and dispute, dissention and discord became evident in the written reflections.

#### *Acceptance of disagreement*

Rodd (1998), discusses how the team may get to a point where they are prepared to take some risks with new practices and debate values and assumptions. Conflict and disagreement become less threatening, and it became less important for the group to protect group cohesion. A shift occurred with the teachers in the registration group where the teachers were able to accept diversity in the practice of others. The teachers realised that when a colleague held a different philosophical belief regarding practice, it did not necessarily need to impact on other teachers' beliefs, practices and philosophies.



### *Overall appreciation of diversity of practice*

Rodd's (1998) fourth stage of team development views members of the team as making a unique but equal contribution, and the responsibility of leadership becomes a shared process. This was evident in the registration group as individual teachers began to identify their own teaching practices. As it was acknowledged that individual teachers in an early childhood teaching environment can carry out a variety of different teaching practices, a form of acceptance grew in the team. The teachers viewed everyone's unique practice as coming together in a collective form of teaching and learning. Therefore, contribution was viewed as unique but equal. This belief sat very comfortably with the overall philosophy of this early childhood centre who viewed learning as a community responsibility where individual strengths and contributions are valued. This centre views themselves as a community of learners. As the teachers moved to the stage of accepting diversity in practice, a shared form of leadership existed in the registration group. By this stage, the responsibility of leadership did not rest with the registration tutor alone to facilitate action. Action was facilitated by the verbal and written communication process that had been set in place.

### **6:4 Teachers held individual beliefs and practices that contributed to the overall collective of teaching and learning**

An important finding that emerged in the investigation was two terms that the teachers used to make meaning of practice. By using these terms teachers were able to identify and articulate their own teaching beliefs and

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understand what they looked like in practice. The term *collaborative practice* was interpreted as being a process whereby a group decision is made prior to any action occurring. All members of the group need to be in 'collaboration' with each other, agreeing on the practice that will be carried out. The behaviour by which the practice will be performed will look the same for each person that performs it.

The term *collective practice* was interpreted as a process whereby an individual decides how they will carry out their practice. There is no need for them to seek prior agreement as the individual teacher knows they are working in with the overall beliefs or philosophy of the centre. The practice of each individual teacher may vary according to the way they interpret the centre philosophy. Teachers can work together as a *collective of practices* with the same overall beliefs in mind.

It appeared that those teachers, who related to the term collaborative practice, preferred the support of the whole team when making decisions on practice. Those teachers who preferred the term collective practice, felt more confident in their own teaching philosophies and practices. These teachers did not need the agreement of the group before trying out a new idea or practice. It can be seen that the difference between the way the teachers described their teaching and learning beliefs is that collective practice incorporates practices and philosophies and collaborative practice addresses conformity of behaviour.

The topic of collaborative and collective practice seemed to be part of many of the later discussions held by the group. Individual practice was also a topic that was common to a number of discussions. Similarities can be drawn with this investigation and the work of Macpherson, Brooker, Aspland, & Cuskelly (2004), who claim that individual and collaborative team practice are explored through a practitioner inquiry.

Eventually, a collective approach to meaning-making occurred in the registration group process where teachers viewed practice from a multi-layered perspective. This way of viewing practice has been called 'practice as a process of change' and is illustrated in the figure 1 further in this chapter.

### **6:5 Sociocultural theory acted as a means of analysis of individual and group practice**

It was important to all of the teachers in this investigation, that the centre philosophy was commonly agreed by everyone. For these teachers this meant a belief in a community of learners approach (Wright, Ryder & Mayo, 2006), to teaching and learning. A community of learners approach acknowledged the child, the parent/whanau and the teacher as unique, but equal contributors to the learning community.

A pre-existing knowledge held by the teachers in regards to understanding sociocultural theory, assisted teachers analysis of practice. Teachers' were very familiar with the three analytical lenses of Rogoff (2003), intra-personal, interpersonal, and cultural/institutional. The pre-existing

knowledge that the teachers had about the theoretical perspective of Rogoff (2003), allowed them to use the three lenses meaningfully in their registration process. The teachers used the three analytical lenses of intrapersonal, interpersonal, and cultural/institutional to reflect, and at times, critically reflect on the practice of their teaching and learning community. The teachers meaningfully reflected on self, self and others, and self and community.

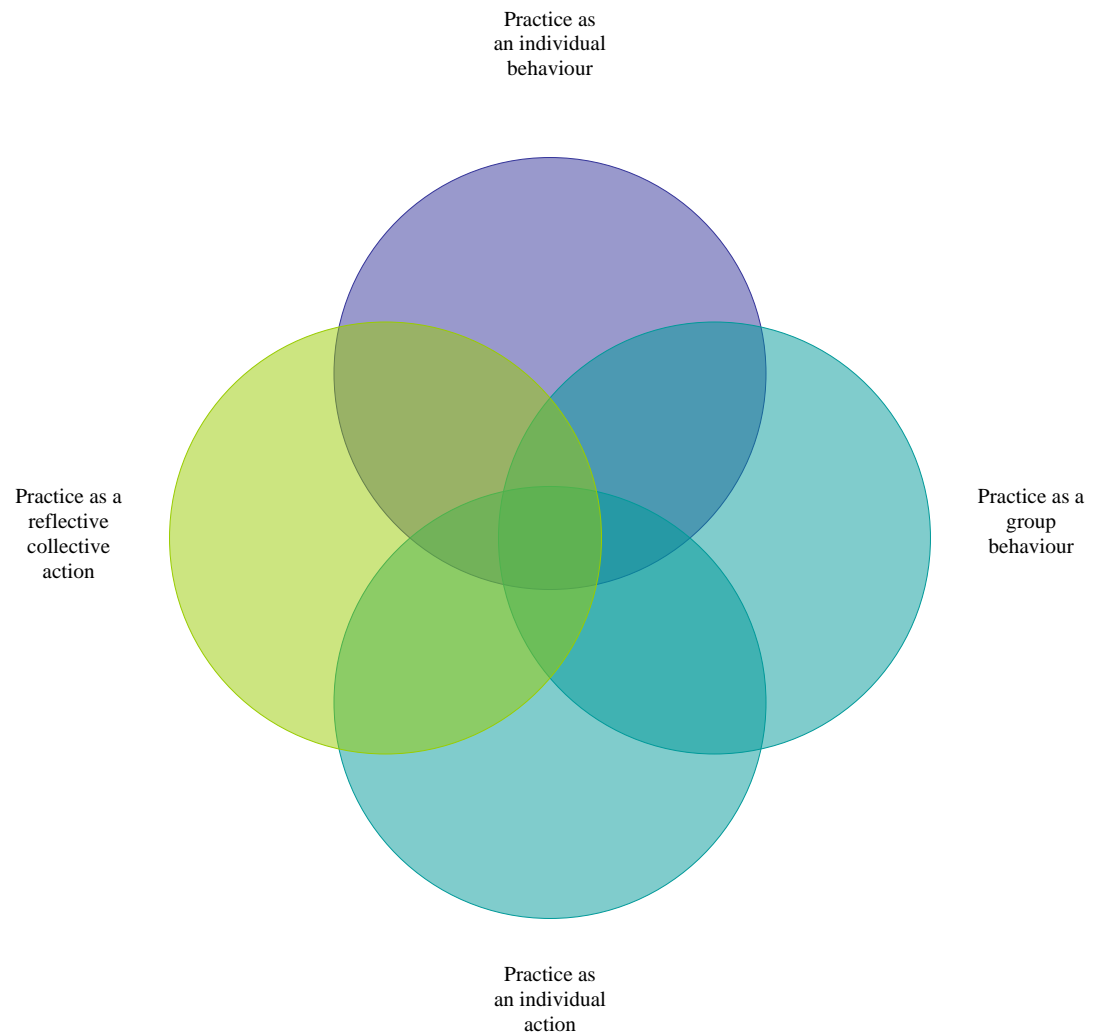
#### **6:6 Responsive facilitation played a key role in the identification of multiple forms of practice**

Another key finding in this investigation was the importance of responsive facilitation in a registration process. The registration tutor acted as a more able peer, mentoring and scaffolding the registering teachers' through a process of self-directed professional development. In the case of a group approach to registration the responsibilities of the registration tutor become shared amongst the group. The focus of the registration moves from self-directed professional development to encompass the group of teachers that the teacher works alongside. The registering teacher gains a bigger picture of teaching practice, as they consider the practices of their colleagues.

However, this does not simply happen by accident. It is a facilitated process. Facilitation is one of the key elements of this registration program. Initially, it is the role of the facilitator to work with the group to

set the ground rules. A 'facilitator as researcher' approach blends the role of registration facilitator with the role of researcher.

During the investigation practice was viewed from at least four differing perspectives, 1). practice as an individual behaviour, 2) practice as group behaviour, 3) practice as an individual action, and 4) practice as a social collective action. 'Practice as a reflexive process of change' is not either collaborative or collective, but it is both collaborative and collective. It is not something that occurs individually or as a group, but occurs both individually and as a group. Practice is not either behaviour or action, but is both behaviour and action. An individual teacher does not relate either to one form of practice or another, but instead, uses different types of practice as the need arises. A group of teachers do not either use one form of practice or another, but use a variety of practices. At the time that the registration group was exploring these multiple forms of practice a diagram was drawn by me that provoked and encouraged further group discussion on the topic. The diagram reflected the different practices as an interconnected view of practice. The centre of figure 1 represents the overlay or multi view of practice.



**Figure 1: Practice as a reflexive process of change**

Following, is a section that explains these four types of practice.

*Practice as an individual behaviour*

Individual teachers have a preferred way of performing routine practices.

The individual teacher will always approach their practice from this perspective, as they are comfortable with their own style. The teacher will

seek out other teachers who have a similar form of practice.

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### *Practice as a group behaviour*

The teaching team as a group prefers to use the same type of practices. This may occur in the area of behaviour management, as the group feels that consistency in teacher behaviour leads to consistency in children's behaviour. This takes a high degree of discussion and calls on all members of the group agreeing with the chosen practices.

### *Practice as an individual action*

The individual teacher is aware that their actions affect the group as a whole. The teacher regularly reflects on their practice in light of the actions of others, and makes changes where needed. The teacher confidently performs their preferred form of practice, although it may look different from other teachers practice. The teacher does not need to have everyone's agreement on their practice before carrying it out.

### *Practice as a reflective/collective action*

This form of practice concerns itself with exploring the taken-for-granted assumptions of the group. Teachers use reflective writing and reflective discussion as the means by which assumptions are explored. The group understands that their actions impact on each other.

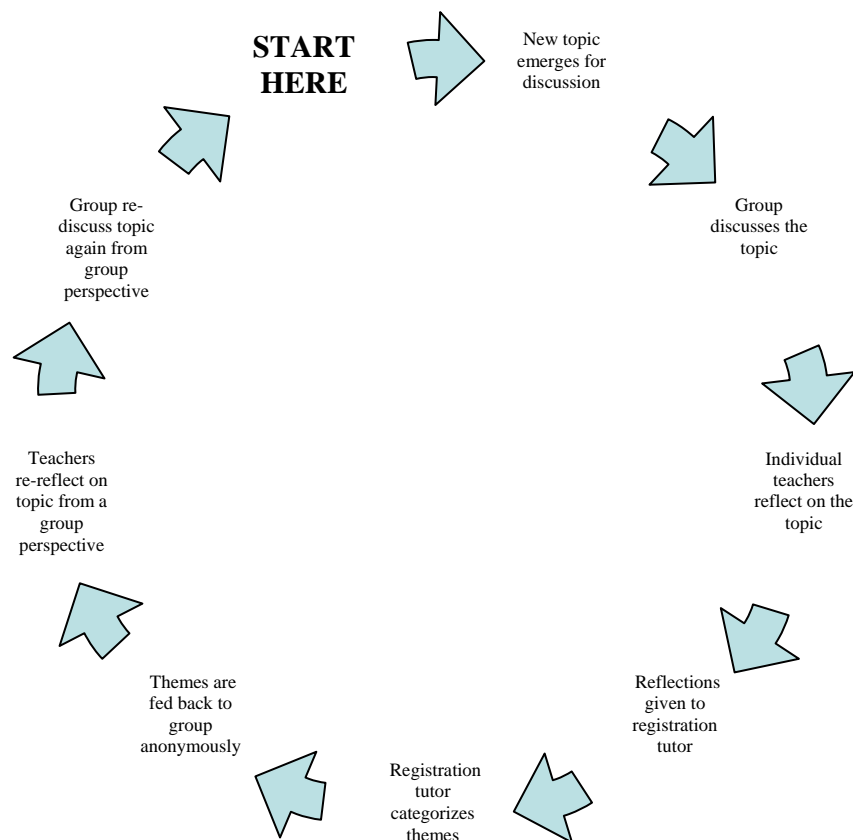
### *Practice as a reflexive process of change*

This is demonstrated by the inner section of the diagram. Multiple forms of practice are explored in the group, and as individuals. Diversity and difference is explored and celebrated. Assumptions and beliefs are

continued to be explored. Teachers re-reflect on their individual and group practices.

### 6:7 A reflexive action research framework emerged from the investigation that supports individual and group inquiry

A second diagram is suggested as a visual way of understanding what the action research process looked like for this group. *Reflexive action research* is illustrated here as a cyclical process. This diagram is stylised and does not do full justice to the complexities that are involved in this form of group reflexion.



**Figure 2: Reflexive action research as a group registration approach**



This process emerged in the investigation as the group regularly discussed, reflected, and documented together. Initially *reflexive action research* was facilitated by the registration tutor. The stages of reflexive action research are described in the following section.

#### *New topic emerges for discussion*

Topics for discussion arise from everyday teaching and learning experiences.

#### *Group discusses the new topic*

The topic is discussed in the group, and different assumptions and beliefs regarding how the group should act as early childhood teachers are explored. Contribution to the discussion process is voluntary. Some members of the group may choose not to contribute to the discussion process. Agreement may or may not be possible, and therefore a decision may be made to bring the topic to the following meeting. This allows the teachers' time to reflect on the topic over the following month.

#### *Individual teacher's reflect on the topic*

The teachers spend the time between meetings reflecting on the topic. A written form of reflection is encouraged, allowing the teachers to document their thoughts. Teachers might observe how their colleagues put the topic into practice. Teachers' reflect on their colleagues practice as a process of making meaning. Some teachers might prefer to use written reflection, rather than discussion, as their preferred communication

process. Teachers' begin to identify and write about differences in individual teacher practice. Written reflections allow teachers to articulate what they do and do not agree with.

*Reflections are given to the registration tutor*

Written reflections are copied and shared with the registration tutor/facilitator. This is a voluntary process. This one way written reflective process allows individual teachers to articulate their assumptions and beliefs. The registering teacher needs to feel assured that their personal information will be received in the manner in which it is written. Confidentiality is an important aspect at this point.

*Registration tutor categorizes into themes*

Common themes in the individual reflections are identified, categorized and compared. As incoming teacher reflections are compared to previous ones, group themes and individual themes are identified. This is an important stage as it allows the registration tutor to gain an understanding of individual and group knowledge.

*Themes are fed back to the group anonymously*

These individual, anonymous themes are made public and shared with the group. It is important for the group that common themes from the individual teacher reflections take on a two-way approach back to the group. Anonymous themes are read out at the end of a meeting, and all teachers have their own copy to take away and reflect further on.

Reflexive communication builds as the individual written reflections, are reported to the group as a whole. This is an essential step, as it allows the general thoughts of the group to be made public. In this way, a new form of group knowledge emerges.

*Teachers 're-reflect' on group topic from the groups' perspective*

Teachers then individually 're-reflect' (reflex) on this new group knowledge gained. Teachers reflect on the differing practices that have been raised, and reflect how their philosophies relate to the practice that has been reflected on.

*Group re-discuss the topic from a group perspective*

A complex level of discussion and reflection occurs as the group further discusses the emerging themes that are becoming apparent. The registration tutor/facilitator assists the group to explore similarities and differences in practice and underlying issues. The reflexive action research process that is occurring, acts as a 'prism' or 'mirror', to the teacher's everyday cultural practices of the centre. As the individual reflections are reported through the facilitator and back to the group, the interpretation of practice might change direction, causing the discussion to move in directions that may have been opposite to its original intention. As the reflexive communication process occurs it allows all voices in the group to be heard.

## **6.8 Discussion of strengths and weaknesses in this thesis**

This thesis has focussed on the interactions in the period between October 2004 and November 2005 and is written from the perspective of the researcher who was also the registration tutor. It was never my intention to track the individual progress of the teachers and as a result it appears that my voice is privileged over the voices of the teachers.

This investigation has centred on the processes we used as a group of teachers working together for a shared purpose, to discuss individual and group early childhood education practice. The investigation has highlighted some difficulties teachers in the early childhood sector may experience in finding their individual voices, and yet this is one of the goals of teacher registration. Thus, by not bringing the individual teachers' voices to the fore, this investigation has enabled me to identify some debilitating assumptions, held by teachers in this group.

One assumption originally identified in this investigation was the need by the group for agreement. It was important for this group to 'work together as a team', and the teachers' interpreted working together as all agreeing on using the same form of teaching strategies. An outcome from this belief in agreement of practice was that in the registration group some teachers believed that it was better to remain silent than to disagree with the majority opinion. Another influence was that it was better to remain silent than be wrong in one's opinion. Therefore if a teacher was less confident

with the topic discussed at a particular meeting, they tended to choose to not to take part in that discussion.

Similarly, this study has shown that as teachers become more confident in their own contribution to a group they become more flexible and able to tolerate differences within the group. Findings such as these have much to offer the early childhood community as it grapples with questions about how individual registration processes can be supported within a sociocultural framework. As I argue in the final chapter, the adults who are working toward registration are learners whose learning is supported within communities of learning.

When I have discussed the ideas in this thesis with others, for example at the Early Childhood Convention 2007, the notion of a group registration process has been challenged. The group registration process not allowing for individual teacher voices, but is instead viewed as a single anonymous voice is interpreted by some as reducing the need for an individual teacher to speak out where they disagree on an issue. This may be so, in the first steps of the process, but as the registration group continue to explore their practice and recognise the diversity of ideas that surrounds them they learn to speak up more so that all teachers come to take an active part in discussions.

The technique of using the common anonymous voice of the group is a strategy for bringing out differences in viewpoint in ways that are not threatening to the teachers. Early childhood teachers work closely

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alongside each other and cannot afford to enter into a communication process that threatens their everyday working relationships. The discussion that flows from the teachers' anonymous written reflective process opens up opportunities for broader discussion. As this investigation has shown, when the anonymous written reflections are combined with discussion it fosters the voices of all the participants. The technique of categorizing the teacher written reflections into common themes and anonymously feeding it back to the group is a strategy for opening up conversation and ensuring that everyone's ideas are included in discussions.

The apparent absence of teachers' voices within this thesis is a consequence of my determination not to track individual teachers' participation and pathways toward registration. In retrospect I see that it would have been possible to focus more on teachers' insights into the process and bring their voices into the discussion more fully (appendix twelve includes teachers' comments about the registration process).

A problem that has echoed through the whole of this thesis is that of finding my own voice in the various roles I have played in this activity, and in finding ways to report the ideas of others. I am convinced that practitioner action research is a valuable approach but I am also aware of tensions between this kind of research and traditional methodologies where the researcher seeks to be objective.

## Chapter Seven: Conclusion

This investigation developed from a need for five early childhood teachers to become fully registered. A group registration process emerged whereby all five teachers could work on their individual practice in a collective forum. The government's call for more early childhood teachers to become registered provoked a sociocultural look at individual and group teaching practice in this early childhood setting.

The culture of the early childhood centre that this investigation was set in was one that already had a very strong understanding of sociocultural theory. This thesis shows that, by carrying through an understanding of intra- and inter- personal lenses (Rogoff, 2003) into the collective registration programme, the process of reflective writing allowed room for individual expression, and the monthly discussion allowed room for group communication. The community of learner's perspective was already a part of the culture of this setting, thus enabling participants of this investigation to contribute as and when they wished. This was evident in the way the teachers led their own meetings, and the way they were keen to contribute to the reflective writing process.

This thesis highlights the importance of an emergent form of practitioner research where problems that emerge in practice can be addressed using innovative strategies. The investigation itself grew out of the need for supervision of several teachers to seek full registration. The notion of shared supervision emerged. The findings of this thesis suggest that this

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was more than a stop-gap measure. There is potential to further develop collective registration processes as a tool for fostering and strengthening teachers' individual and shared knowledge. There is potential, also, for registration groups to straddle different institutions. This could be a way to address the emerging concerns within the early childhood sector about professional development being too closely linked to individual institutions. The *reflexive action research* process discussed in this thesis (section 6.7) has relevance to any group that wishes to explore practice from a sociocultural perspective.

With the on-going demand for more teachers needing to register, the idea of combining practitioner research and teacher registration is worthy of further investigation.

This investigation identified issues around enabling teachers to speak openly in meetings. The teachers developed the skill of writing openly about their reactions to the discussions in meeting and they shared this writing with the registration tutor yet they were not always expressing these ideas in meetings. The strategy of pulling the varied ideas together as “common anonymous themes” (section 4:5) enabled all teachers, at subsequent meetings, to take part in discussion around different understandings of practice. It became clear that some teachers assumed that everyone had to agree on everything: these teachers tended to be silent if they did not agree. The discussions around common anonymous



themes enabled the group to recognise the value of diverse points of view and encouraged everyone to seek to understand the ideas of others.

This finding suggests there may be a need, within ongoing professional development in early childhood education, to highlight the importance of diverse opinions and views and to develop skills within early childhood education teachers to share their thinking openly, and to be able to agree to differ. The challenge is to find ways to ensure that meaningful conversations include diverse points of view. The common anonymous voice technique may prove to be a useful strategy within this process.

The reflexive action research framework developed in this study links the professional development of the individual teacher with the collective process of the group and it is consistent with and builds on sociocultural theory which is at the heart of good practice in early childhood education. More investigation is needed into how individual centres are coping with the growing demand of registering teaching staff. Some of the money that is targeted for each individual teacher's registration process could be used to support groups of teachers to collaborate toward registration.

A creative solution was developed by this centre to the dilemma of not having enough registered teachers to act as registration tutors. Rather than creating a registration dilemma, the problem was turned around. Working toward registration was previously thought of in terms of individual supervision and development. This study has shown the value of reconceptualising registration in socio-cultural terms as a form of

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collective learning where individual accountability to the group ensures individual development. The teachers made meaning by working collaboratively as they clarified their own individual understandings. The individual is not forgotten in a sociocultural approach to learning where the individuals' views, opinions and expertise are honoured as valued contributions to the cultural context of the learning community.

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## **Appendix One:**

### **Information and consent form for teachers**

Information and consent forms were handed to the teachers before the investigation was able to begin. Consent was obtained, as was ethical approval.

**Title of thesis: Exploring notions of a group approach to early  
childhood teacher registration**

**Teacher information and consent form**

By 2012 75 % of all early childhood teachers will need to be qualified and registered to be able to work in an early childhood centre. In our centre we have five teachers who want to go through their registration advice and guidance program. The suggestion has been made by me that a group approach to registration be adopted.

I would like to research our group registration program as it develops. This thesis investigation will not be seen to drive the direction of registration program, but the registration program will drive the direction of the research investigation. The intention is that as a group we will explore notions of what it means to be a 'professional' teacher. We will further explore the 'communities of learners' approach. Collaborative inquiry will help to strengthen our understanding of the four main teaching criteria – professional practice, professional relationships, professional knowledge, and professional leadership. Our centre has been working with the methodology of Participant Action Research with the Ministry of Education research program, and this methodology will continue for this investigation. This research investigation will be participant research.

I will encourage teachers to write regular reflections. These will serve as a way of recording an individual self-review process for each teacher. These reflections may also be called on for this research investigation. Teachers do not have to share their written reflections if they do not wish. I will be keeping my own reflective journal, where I will record my reflections directly after each monthly meeting. Occasionally, the meetings may be taped, but this will not be regular practice. I will summarize the group discussions and feed them back to the next monthly meeting.

Because this early childhood centre is connected with a nationally recognized research program, total anonymity cannot be guaranteed. However, confidentiality and individual anonymity in the reporting of teacher's comments will be guaranteed. Pseudonyms will be used to ensure anonymity in the group.

## Consent Form

I understand that:

- As a member of the registration program I do not have to take part in this investigation if I do not wish.
- There will be no discrimination against me should I not want to take part in this research investigation, and I will still remain an active member of the registration group.
- I have the right to withdraw from the investigation at any time.
- Total centre anonymity cannot be guaranteed.
- My individual anonymity will be guaranteed due to the use of pseudonyms.
- Confidentiality will occur within the investigation process.
- The findings of this investigation may be published or presented at appropriate conferences.
- The thesis arising from this investigation will be deposited in the university library.

I give/do not give Debbie Ryder permission to carry out this research investigation:

Yes/No - (please circle)

Name of person giving permission:

.....  
Signature:

.....  
Date:

.....

*76a. Rocking Horse Road, Christchurch, New Zealand. Ph 03 382 970,  
e-mail [seaandsand@xtra.co.nz](mailto:seaandsand@xtra.co.nz)*

Making meaning: A team of early childhood education teachers working towards registration from a group perspective.

Debbie Ryder

23/10/2007

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## **Appendix Two:**

### **First meeting**

The first meeting explored the teaching dimensions, and this meeting was recorded and handed to teachers at the second meeting. This process was the beginning of many times that teachers were 'fed back' what had occurred at previous meetings.

*This sheet was handed out to all teachers at the first registration meeting, giving an overall focus for the meeting. Teachers were given journals to encourage individual reflective writing.*

**Date: 26.08.04**

Explain the context of Debbie's thesis inquiry and how it directly relates to this advice and guidance program.

Hand out journals and clear file to each member of the group

Hand out and work through the information we have so far regarding teacher registration and advice and guidance that has come off the Teacher's Council website:

1. What are the requirements to become fully registered?
2. What is advice and guidance?
3. How does the advice and guidance program fit with the learning centre appraisal system and with performance management requirements?
4. What is needed to make an advice and guidance program work well?
5. How can I make the best use of professional development time?
6. What documentation do I need to keep?
7. Who does what?

Hand out and work through the information regarding teacher registration from the N.Z.E.I management booklet:

1. Teachers Council functions
2. Why register?
3. Requirements of registration
4. working positively with a registration supervisor
5. Advice and Guidance Program
6. Record keeping
7. The Pathway to teacher registration
8. Satisfactory teacher criteria
9. Registration 'subject to confirmation'
10. The registration supervisor

Hand out the information on the four teaching dimensions:

11. Professional knowledge
12. Professional practice
13. Professional relationships
14. Professional leadership

Where to from here?

- Look through the four teaching dimensions over the next month and at the next meeting we will be able to make a more informed decision on what you want to look at.
- Will there be times when you want to explore some issues individually, and explore some issues as a group?
- Come to the next meeting with areas of your practice you want to explore, we can put all these ideas together and gradually use this as a guide to work by.
- Use your reflective journal to make notes in between meetings, ie issues you are working on, work that we are doing as a group etc.

Making meaning: A team of early childhood education teachers working towards registration from a group perspective.

## **Appendix three:**

### **Minutes from meetings**

Minutes were taken at every meeting – minutes from March 2005 meeting included



**Dated 31<sup>st</sup> March 2005 (typed directly from minutes book)**

Teachers present: Anne, Sue, Cathy, Donna, Kirsty, Debbie (registration tutor)

C – Asking for help, parents needs, working as a group, more professional development, Associate teacher, more enthusiasm for experiences, respect and valuing others opinions, share ideas and provide support, ask for help with behaviour management.

K – Listening to children's voice in art, action art ideas, family participation regarding new projects, valuing strengths and weaknesses

A – Consistency with behaviour management, positive team relationships, meaningful reflections (not just for the sake of it), understanding routines – good transitions, exploring projects (continue working towards questions), transition to school, being an associate teacher, dramatic play, further knowledge in visual arts.

D – Behaviour management, group time activities, Te Whaariki display in whanau room, technology – learn to use the video camera, professional development in inclusive education, languages.

D – Role as a participant, role as a registration supervisor, how it looks being a co-participant and registration supervisor, valuing contribution, reflecting on how group processes influences individual teaching, sound documentation processes, keep individual documentation, develop user-friendly registration process that can be documented and used as a possible resource for others.

S – Technology literate, parents' names, being an associate teacher, more administrative responsibility, sharing time with all children and establish relationships, talk about children more, continue professional development, feel empowered – acknowledge the achievement of being registered

Where to next? Key/common points: Behaviour management (sheet) – use Te Whaariki language with the children, eg, valuing, belonging etc.

Meetings that have a focus: Issues are practical issues. Look at a way to incorporate practical issues. Have a focus for each meeting set at the prior meeting. Next meeting: Reflect about behaviour management (consistent practices). It's about how, as a group, we will manage behaviour – consistency.

## **Appendix Four:**

### **Example of researcher's journal entry**

The researcher kept a journal and notes were taken after each registration meeting.

The July 2005 journal entry is included as the researcher is beginning to identify themes of the investigation - collaborative and collective practice, and how practice connects to philosophy.

**Dated 28<sup>th</sup> July 2005 (typed directly from journal)**

The focus for the meeting was 'working within a team'. There had been some confusion from the last meeting as to what the focus was – it turned out to be the most in-depth meeting so far.

Previously, we had discussed the difference between 'collaborative' and 'collective'. This has not been fully explored yet and will probably be an ongoing focus.

We talked a lot about the difference between what is discussed in the meeting (language of collaboration, support for each other, working together etc.), and the actual everyday teaching practice.

Some teachers seemed very aware of this difference, while others seemed unaware of what we were talking about. Two teachers seemed to speak only about 'us all working together'. As if there was no contrast in the behaviour in the group – and the teaching practice.

We talked about the need for honest communication, respecting that people may not want to communicate immediately, and if so, they would say ""I'll talk about it tomorrow with you if that's o.k"".

The teachers talked about the difference between their teaching philosophies and their teaching practice. They all decided to explore their own philosophies over time. We talked about making the philosophy realistic to their practice – not too flowery.

We ended the meeting by passing out copies of questions, looking at past personal histories, questions about working in a group, and also discussing collective and collaborative practice

## **Appendix Five:**

### **One teacher's written reflection**

Teachers wrote reflections after each meeting. The July 2005 meeting is being reflected on by one particular teacher. After the written reflections occurred they were handed in to registration tutor

**Dated 30<sup>th</sup> July 2005 (typed directly from Sue's journal)**

I really got a lot out of the meeting – especially the part of what we say in the meeting isn't always what happens in practice. However, I don't feel that when this occurs it does so from hypocrisy, but rather as we are all individuals we interpret things differently.

For instance, if in the meeting I declared that I'd try to be firmer with children (and I did this in my practice) all of the other teachers may have differing definitions of what 'firmness' means, and may come to the erroneous conclusion that I'm not 'practicing what I preach'. Even though I truly think I was being firmer and actively practicing this.

Secondly, it was very apt that we spoke about the importance of honesty and how we'd like to reach the point where we could be frank with each other. During the meeting I reflected deeply on what was occurring for me the previous weeks, and that made it easier to have the discussion time with you.

However, I feel that honesty has its limits, which is sensible. I feel there are certain issues that would be too hurtful to address certain teachers with, no matter how tactful you may be.

## **Appendix Six:**

### **Collaborative Practice**

After the written reflections are handed in to the tutor they are categorised into themes – this is an example of the collaborative practice data

Original diary from teacher reflections.

## Collaborative practice

My last reflection regarding behaviour in a difficult situation if other teachers respond in a confident manner towards you. In other words, back you up - even or differently.

management is - It is great when dealing with respond in a confident manner towards you. In other words, back you up - even or differently.

When reflecting about practices in a group, I find that other people's comments often trigger my own thoughts or remind me about things I need to work on in my own practice. I find the same sort of things and I always find it easier to lift or change my own practice when others are doing the same around me.

I said before, often my own thoughts and the need to reflect on my own practice are enhanced through the discussion with others who are of like mind and motivation. So I foresee that this process is going to be valuable for me. It will be interesting to see each time how our own reflections are given more depth when they include the reflection of the group process. I know that we can learn from each other by sharing but writing down what has been shared will consolidate that learning.

129 group  
Ant Collaborative  
Logic  
Group  
writing  
reflection

I found this reflecting helpful in deciding how we as teachers could work together for the common good of all the children, the teachers and how we could decide on different things that may have been at concern for each of the teachers.

Being flexible is so very important for the teachers and sharing things which are happening behaviour wise for the children is so very important.

It is vital to support each other and work together as a collaborative team as we all have to offer to each other which are valuable skills.

One of the key issues that came up through this discussion was the need for consistency in dealing with behaviour which we do not wish to encourage. This consistency issue now stays firmly in my mind when I'm confronted with adverse behaviour. I know how important it is for that particular child to be treated in a consistent manner by the teachers. Something that I have now added to my practice (as a result of the meeting) is that if a child needs to have some quiet time it is no longer necessary now to automatically bring that child inside (if outside) or on the sofa (if inside).

We have discussed this issue many times recently, it always comes up and to be honest nothing changes and I felt in the meeting we just repeated the same things we all know and believe. We affirmed our beliefs on how things should be and that's all.

and I agree that you can work collaboratively with people you do not know well - complete strangers can work together for a common goal.

Collaborative practice is when everyone works together on the basis of consensus. It often involves a majority-wins process where compromises are made. In my mind both practices are vital within a team as there are times where the practices of individual teachers can be and should be fostered and other times where practices can only work when we collaborate and work to a common goal.

Collaborative practice can consolidate processes within the curriculum. As the two concepts are quite different each one has a down side. When we all work collaboratively, compromises have to be made and sometimes not every body's voice is heard. This is something that

## **Appendix Seven:**

### **Collective Practice**

After the written reflections are handed in to the tutor they are categorised into themes – this is an example of the collective practice data



# Collective practice

Appendix 9

The discussion that arose from the Behaviour Management issues identifies that the group are accepting of each others individuality. The group's philosophy on dealing with issues case by case and the need for effective communication reflects my own philosophy.

All in all I very pleased with the meetings and they have impacted on my practice. I just hope with time all of the teachers will feel secure and safe enough to share their thoughts especially if these thoughts differ from the entire teaching team.

However, there is a degree of intimacy involved between parties before a collective approach can work.

My understanding of collective practice is when individual practice and values are maintained when working in a group.

Collective practice within the team allows for individual strengths, diversity and variety. It also allows for the sharing of ideas that other teachers have not thought of.

It appears that a collaborative approach occurs within the registration meeting process where as individual teachers are working in a collective approach in practice. This has lead me to think about the question (and not answer now) "what happens when teachers act collectively and their philosophies oppose each other?" There are times when the only way to maintain continuity for children is to take a collaborative approach, if we always work from a collective perspective then it is difficult to establish and maintain regulation standards and policy etc. I think though that everyone needs to feel that they have a voice and that it is safe to express their own philosophy. I also feel that a collective approach is harder to work at in both the registration process and in practice. Sometimes, no matter how safe the environment, individuals may not feel like contributing ideas and thoughts for a number of reasons. For things that I don't feel strongly about I'm quite happy to go with the how the majority feel and do not always feel it necessary to voice the same ideas – work in a collaborative manner. It is only when I have a strong opinion or philosophy that I feel that I need to be heard.

Collective is coming together, as a team but with the understanding that each person has strengths which if utilised, can teach other teachers, parents and children. The collective view works as a community and the individual teacher enjoys passing on her strength (by identifying with her individual area of strength or strengths) and knowledge to people and children who are interested. E.g. such as co-construction of board games with the children, story telling, physical activities or art.

There fore as a team we are all reflecting, drawing and valuing everyone as equal teachers or of similar philosophy and supporting each others strengths, while understanding each others weakness. The collective of teaching and learning styles needs to understand and value 'the reflection' process as a individual persons ideas, which are reflected as just that ideas, to be considered and re reflected on as a collective group. Everyone in the group must be understood and recognised as having some value in what they personally see as meaningful teaching and learning. The collective group can draw on everyone's ideas and reflect to create excitement and change to work towards project and quality practice.

If a collective decision is formed then in practice out in the centre, it should be valued and used to create meaningful and enjoyable learning for children, teachers and parents. It should be re discussed in the meeting forum, if change is to occur in the practice, so as to allow us to all work as a community/ collective.

There should be excitement about what and how the learning or project is developing and showing of an interest of these ideas from all areas, children,

## Appendix Eight

### Defining collective practice

Defining collective practice further – this appendix also shows the researcher's scribbles as she is working through this idea of collective practice

16 Categorizing all data regarding collective practice from teacher reflections - includes researchers

This represents my thinking around how the teachers are handling interpreting the role of the individual within the registration within group process. analysis

### Definitions

- Collective: A group of people working on an enterprise and sharing the benefits from it.
- Reaching an agreement/conclusion through negotiation or through a majority decision making.
- A deep understanding and awareness of each other and their values...to work collaboratively it is not necessary.
- Individuals that make up a group - having a shared interest
- Accepting of each other's individuality
- When individual practice and values are maintained when working within a group.
- When the team allows for individual strengths, diversity and variety.
- Coming together, as a team but with the understanding that each person has strengths which if utilised, can teach other teachers, parents, children.

### What collective practice looks like

- Therefore, as we, the teaching team work together on each project focus we all gain benefits, and these benefits can be different for each of us.
- The collective view works as a community and the individual teacher enjoys passing on her strengths and knowledge to people and children who are interested.
- Our practice at the moment is very collective and will be until all practices come together as a team.

### Other thoughts and reflections on 'collective' practice

- As the two processes are quite different each one as a down side. With collaborative practice not everybody's voice is heard. → why are the teachers thinking this?
- Needs to be a degree of intimacy between parties before a collective approach can work. → is that where the deep understanding, awareness values etc comes
- Allows for the sharing of ideas that others have not thought of.
- What happens when teachers act collectively and their philosophies oppose each other? → can this occur? Seems the opposite of the point just made.
- If we always work from a collective perspective then it is difficult to establish and maintain regulation standards, policies etc. → Perhaps this then is a collaborative agreement
- Everyone needs to feel that they have a voice and can feel safe to express their own philosophy. → does a collective approach ensure this occurs? - the marks
- A collective approach is harder to work at, both in the reg group and in practice.
- No matter what the circumstances sometimes individuals never feel safe to ideas and thoughts. share
- It is only when I have a strong opinion or philosophy that I feel I need to be heard.
- As a team we are all reflecting, drawing and valuing everyone as equal teachers or of similar philosophy, while understanding each others weaknesses. → Are we
- The collective of teaching and learning styles needs to understand and value 'the reflection' process as an individual persons ideas, which are reflected as just that - ideas, to be considered and re reflected on as a collective group. → clear interpretation by one teacher.

### Collective and collaborative - both vital approaches

- Both collective and collaborative practices are vital within a team as there are times where the practices of individual teachers can be and should be fostered, and

## Appendix Nine

### Working together as a team

Analysing individual teacher's written reflections, leading to creating group knowledge regarding working together as a team



7 c.

## 1. Practice as a group behaviour. Working together as a group.

There are times when the only way to maintain continuity for children is to take a collaborative approach, if we always work from a collective perspective then it is difficult to establish and maintain regular standards and policies.

- \* Work together for the common good of all the children and teachers
- \* Able to work better alongside the other teachers
- \* It is vital to support each other and work together as a collaborative team

I need to support the group times more

- \* Supporting other teachers
- \* Work in partnership with each other
- \* 2-way mutual shared relationship – working to a common goal
- \* Collaboratively help each other
- \* Use each other's strengths
- \* We have a responsibility to each other and our community to be the best we can be
- \* Work collaboratively together
- \* Drawing of each others strengths
- \* Work together in a partnership together

Be able to support each other

Collaboration between teachers helps them to become members of an environment where we are all learners as well as teachers

Collaboration is a two-way shared relationship

I would hope that we could all work collaboratively together

Wanting to support the other teachers with their work

What I love about our work is how the children's interest becomes a passion for the teachers.. and we work in partnership with the family/community

We collaborate when we work together in our teaching teams re: project work

When we all work together collaboratively, compromises have to be made and sometimes not everybody's voices have been heard

## **Appendix Ten:**

### **Individual practice**

Analysing individual teacher's written reflections, leading to creating group knowledge regarding individual practice

9d.

**2. Practice as an individual action – How does individual self-reflection strengthen my teaching and learning practices?**

To reflect on my own teaching philosophy and teaching styles

Reflect more on my own practices

Having to think about why I have done something

Consider how I might do something better

I began to question my approach - I am firm when needed and very consistent

I know that we can learn from each other by sharing but writing down what has been shared will consolidate that learning.

I am asking myself - would my talk match my practice?

I'm not sure if I am an effective communicator and taking the brave step and 'speaking out' - there have been times in the past when I have been brave enough to speak out and been shot down.

I reflect on my personal view to behaviour management as listening to the children's voices, asking them questions why, and supporting the child - asking children how they or the other child feels

A personal goal to try and communicate more with my colleagues

If I discuss and model my own personal philosophy it will increase how behaviour management is dealt with

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## **Appendix Eleven:**

### **Supporting diversity**

Analysing individual teacher's written reflections, leading to creating group knowledge regarding supporting diversity



**3. *Practice as a social action* – How can we allow room for individual and diverse approaches to practice within the collective group?**

Support and nurture those who have weaknesses in other areas

Supporting each others weaknesses and be able to draw us all together closely

Not working together but being more individual

Teachers may all come together as a group and share a common interest but this doesn't mean that they come together in harmony for a common outcome

Being more open to other people's teaching styles, philosophies and opinions on different issues

Willingness to share ideas on different things

Making you really think about things even if you do not always agree

Always willing to share ideas and offer suggestions

Acknowledges what it is you are saying even if she may not agree but she can see where you are coming from

Wanting to learn new things and give new things a go

I can identify other teacher's strengths and weaknesses and am happy to help in any way

I am more aware of other teacher's thoughts on a number of different areas

It is important for teachers to identify each other's strengths in order to be able to maximize these to their best advantages in supporting the teaching team

Support each other's weaknesses and to help and encourage and support these teacher's growth in these areas

The importance of sharing one's feelings especially if help is needed

## **Appendix Twelve:**

### **Benefits of group registration**

Analysing teacher's reflections, leading to creating group knowledge regarding the benefits of group registration

4. Conclusions

The group meetings help me to look at myself, my practices and to make changes when I need to

What we discuss (in the registration group) is always relevant and requires reflection, and reflection is essential in our professional development

When reflecting about practice within the registration group I often find other people's comments trigger my own thoughts or remind me about things I need to work on in my practice.

Supporting each other and communication between staff was the key to effectively guiding children

Reflection on my own practices are enhanced through the discussion with others who are of like mind and motivation

The value on reflecting on our practice in and as a group provides support for me to be an effective member of this teaching team.

I thought some valid points were brought up at the meeting but felt that some issues were discussed at surface level, perhaps this is because only a few people had written down point to be discussed.

I felt that a lot of what was said involved 'buzz words' that always pop up when we talk about 'working as a team' and I wonder if these will remain buzz words or if changes will actually be made.

I believe that communication is an al important component of team work.

It will be interesting to see how our reflections are given more depth when they include the reflection of the group process

The idea of the project books all being accessible to the parents and teachers was discussed and during the week a table near the entrance was set up for the books  
When the teaching team work together on each project focus we all gain benefits and these benefits can be different from each other

One of the key issues that came up in the meeting was the need for consistency in dealing with behaviour

## **Appendix Thirteen:**

### **Investigating socio-cultural understandings of early childhood practice**

Questions asked of teachers to promote individual teacher's written reflections. This lead to a discussion where the group shared understandings of intra-personal, inter-personal, and cultural look at early childhood practice.

*The following questions were given to the teachers to encourage a socio-cultural look at practice. Date: September 2005*

**Foregrounding the 'intra-personal' lens as you reflexively identify your individual practice:**

1. What can you say about your schooling that you feel might have influenced your decision to be an early childhood teacher?
2. Was there a particular teacher or teachers who might have influenced your decision to be a teacher?
3. Do you think there are any other aspects to your personal history that may have influenced your decision to be an early childhood teacher, if so, what were those influences?
4. Can you identify the following forms of actions and behaviours within your practice: individual, reflective, collaborative, and collective?
5. What influence (if any) might this reflexive group inquiry process have on allowing you to make connections with these different forms of practice?

**Foregrounding the 'interpersonal' lens as you reflexively identify the practice of the teaching team**

1. How do you think your influences from your past personal life alter/affects the way you relate to your colleagues?
2. Can you identify individual, collaborative, reflective, collective and practice within the present teaching team as a whole?
3. Are there any teachers whose communication experience/practice you have found helpful in relation to your own practice? If so, can you comment on the experience/practice that you admire, and why?
4. Do you approach people whose communication and teaching practice you admire and ask them for guidance? If so, what does this process feel like, and has it been worthwhile?
5. Are there any aspects to your colleagues' communication and teaching practice that you do not find helpful, if so what are they?
6. What influences (if any) might this reflexive inquiry group process have on helping you become more aware of other teachers communication and teaching practices?

**Foregrounding the 'cultural/institutional' lens as centre historically formed practices and relationships are reflexively explored**

1. Can you identify the pre-existing individual, collaborative, reflective, and collective and practices that were occurring within the centre when you started?
2. How many of these practices still remain within your learning community?
3. How many of these practices are not currently used due to a change in centre philosophy?
4. How can a reflexive inquiry process assist the community as a whole (teachers, children, parents) to understand and interpret the centre's teaching and learning philosophy?